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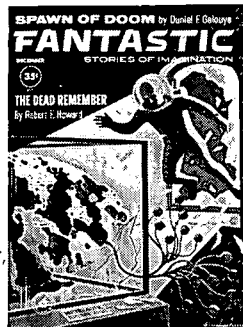


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Fact and Science Fiction Stories

DECEMBER, 1961 Vol. 35, No. 12

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NOVELETS

THE MEMORY OF MARS	
By Raymond F. Jones	14
THE STAR HYACINTHS	
By James H. Schmitz	48

SHORT STORIES

MOTHER AMERICA	
By Sam McClatchie, M.D.	90
THE COSMIC EXPRESS (A Classic Reprint)	
By Jack Williamson	117

SF PROFILE

THE STRANGE CASE OF MURRAY LEINSTER	
By Sam Moskowitz	104

FEATURES

... OR SO YOU SAY	6
EDITORIAL	7
MOSS MARK III	8
"HUGO" WINNERS	103
THE SPECTROSCOPE	130
COMING NEXT MONTH	135

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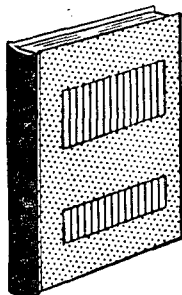
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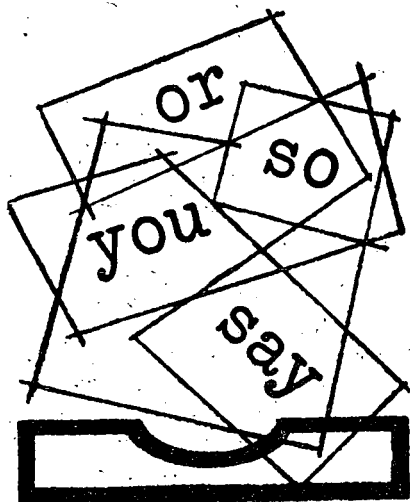
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Dear Editor

Stanley R. Lee's resolution of the time travel paradox in his "The Great Implication" was an interesting and a logical one; however, as at least three possibilities not covered by Pendleton's arguments present themselves, Mr. Lee's theological grounds seem a bit shaky.

In the first place, in a deterministic universe, how could Pendleton "change" his mind unless he was supposed to do so all along? In fact, in a deterministic universe, how could there be any random sampling at all, with or without miracles?

In the second place, referring to controlling someone else's destiny, would it not be possible that the person's destiny would

be incomplete without the meddling and that Pendleton would only be a tool in fashioning the life?

In the third place, to allow a note of free will to creep in, would it not be possible for God in his omniscience to permit man to make his own decisions while God would be simply aware of all possible results of that or any other choice made by man without actually determining the choices (as though God, with an aerial roadmap, surveyed all the possible results of the various turnings man took of his own decision)? In this case, Pendleton's arguments which apply to a deterministic universe would neither prove nor disprove God's existence.

While Mr. Lee's style is delightful, his failure to attend to all possibilities detracts from the quality of the story as a whole; however, fortunately, this fault is rarely to be found in AMAZING's usually well-constructed stories.

Moiya Virginia Norton
13131 Fondren St.
Garden Grove, Calif.

● We asked Mr. Lee to handle his own rebuttal:

Why can't you have random sampling in a deterministic universe? Random sampling is one of God's laws, like gravity and
(Continued on page 136)



EDITORIAL

ONE of the burdens of being a devotee of science-fiction is that non-devotees automatically label you as a rather easily-deluded chap—a simpleton, really—who can actually believe in such outlandish things as life on other planets, alternate time-tracks, possibility worlds, etc. It is often difficult to convince them that, in some instances, it is perfectly legitimate to believe in these things; and that, in others, the sf fan can exert a disciplined suspension of belief in return for the mental stimulation of the yarn.

Well, in the light of all that, it gives me great pleasure to be able to report that the real simpletons of this world include among their number many persons who read nothing but fact. And, as a result, are absolutely made-to-order suckers for anything that is not factual. The sf reader knows full well that the giant spider or the space-warp are—at the moment, at least—imaginary. The reader of fact

seems to lose his discriminatory powers.

A case in point is an article called "Technical Report: Moss Mark III," which appeared in the June 1961 issue of CAR AND DRIVER Magazine. It is reprinted, for your edification, on the following pages. It is giving nothing away, I'm sure, to tell you that the "project"—the design and manufacture of a robot racing driver that would look like a person but drive like a computer—was a leg-pull from the start.

IT WAS much to the surprise of the magazine's editor, thus, when letters from readers began to pour in with such comments as: "I am appalled by your story. Is it true that the Stirling Moss who recently won a race in the U.S. was a machine?" Here are some other reader remarks:

- "How could something like this be kept secret for ten years?"

- "We looked up pictures of Stirling Moss. They look too hu-

man for him to be a robot. All our friends think we're crazy, saying Moss is a robot."

- "This is a fantastic accusation your magazine has made. I would like to know your source for this material. There are many questions unanswered in my mind. How does he speak? How does he see when to turn?"

- "The majority of my friends believe Moss is a robot. Are they right?"

- "How can Moss run to his car if he is a robot? Please answer by mail so I can show the letter to my friends."

- "The pictures are so lifelike the Moss Mark III looks human!"

- "Answer the following question 'Yes' or 'No': Is Stirling Moss a human being?"

The editors of CAR AND DRIVER were forced to send out hundreds of replies explaining their spoof. Only one reader got into the spirit of the thing. He informed the editors that Moss was a robot all right, but a robot built on a planet of Alpha Centauri, on earth to gather information for the invading vanguard, and that the cutaway drawings are a good approximation of a Centaurian's innards. That reader, we like to think, also reads AMAZING STORIES.

At any rate, we think you will enjoy the "Moss Mark III" spoof; and also find new courage in your own propensities for sf in the evidence of the closed-horizon approach of those who live their lives out in a world of nothing but fact.

—NL

Technical Report:

MOSS MARK III

by BROCK YATES and GORDON BRUCE

THE project started during the bleak years following World War II. While dozens of Englishmen labored at their drawing boards planning cars the equal of 158 Alfas and San Remo Maseratis, a tiny, confident group was embarking on a scheme that would shake the sport to its core.

This organization was convinced the first step in making Great Britain a racing power was not the creation of a potent G.P. car, but the development of a driver superior to the contemporary greats like Farina, Ascari and Villoresi. Seaman was long since dead and Mays and

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Howe were retired, leaving only Reg Parnell and George Abecassis to shoulder the British burden. They reasoned if a talented young Englishman could star on a continental team, the resultant national enthusiasm would bring dozens of new green cars to the grid.

The original plan was to locate a brilliant youth and train him intensively for several years. However such a prospect was not to be found and they were forced into their fantastic alternative: *the construction of the ultimate racing driver.*

After rejecting a proposal for an out-and-out robot sloshed over with a heavy coat of B.R.G., the group decided their new device should look and act as a mortal . . . but would drive with flair, precision and courage that no human could duplicate.

DOMINANCE BY MK I

THE enterprise began with a grant of 500,000 pounds from the hush-hush Ministry of Speed Sports. A basic layout of the machine was set down by Dr. Reginald Wollstonecraft-Shelley, whose paternal grandmother, Mary Godwin-Shelley, had been a pioneer in the field.

Dr. Shelley and a team of 17 top engineers and cybernetics experts took 11 months constructing the MK I prototype.

MOSS MARK III

The first field test was a secret run up Prescott on April 24, 1947. Driving an ancient 1.5-liter Delage, it easily shattered the hill's record by 7.3 seconds.

The machine was named Stirling Moss" for several reasons. "Stirling," despite the modified spelling, symbolized the integrity of the English pound and the Empire. "Moss" simply stood for "Ministry of Speed Sports."

Stirling Moss, MK I, began racing on tiny 500 cc Coopers and Kiefts. From the start he dominated the class, turning the tricky Brands Match course into his personal playground.

POWERPLANT ALTERATION

BETWEEN races, technical improvements continued. The power supply was altered from electrical to a highly efficient, perfectly muffled two-stroke, air cooled engine. The original system had run directly from the car's magneto, but complications like the long cord necessary for Le Mans starts forced the change to internal combustion.

By the early 1950s Stirling was giving an excellent account of himself on such varied automobiles as the B.R.M., Jaguar, and H.W.M. And in 1954 his big chance arrived with the fabled Mercedes-Benz Grand Prix team.

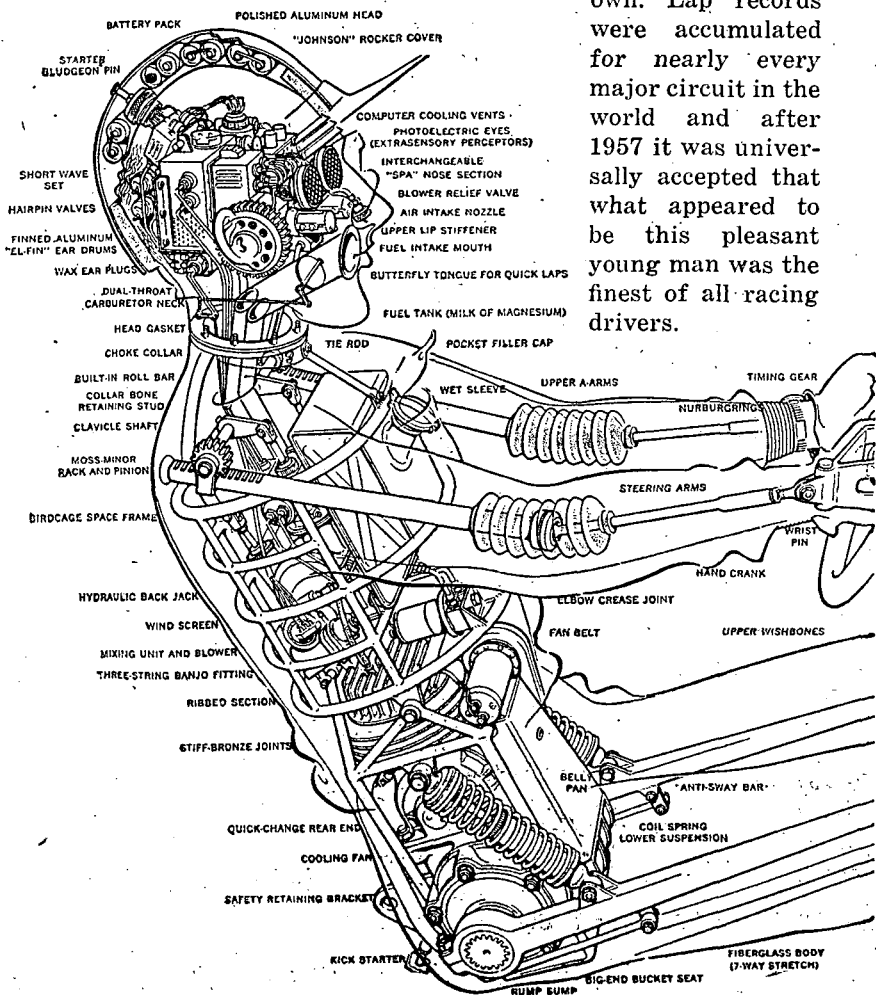
Work on the MK II began in 1955 after one unpleasant fact

became apparent: the MK I could be beaten. Granted, only one man was capable of the feat, but as long as Juan Fangio remained active, Moss could not reach the pinnacle of racing.

The MK II was seemingly a

perfect machine. Lighter by 16.5 pounds, the magnesium and plastic-compound body housed the most sensitive and intelligent computing devices known to man. After a season of development, "he" began to come into "its"

own. Lap records were accumulated for nearly every major circuit in the world and after 1957 it was universally accepted that what appeared to be this pleasant young man was the finest of all racing drivers.



ONE FATAL FLAW

BUT the MK II had one failing: it lacked prudence. Once in the car, Moss would flog it around in a blinding series of perfectly executed drifts, slides, brakings and gear changes. Every movement would be carried out flawlessly and his car would circulate lap-on-lap at the maximum. Unfortunately this pace

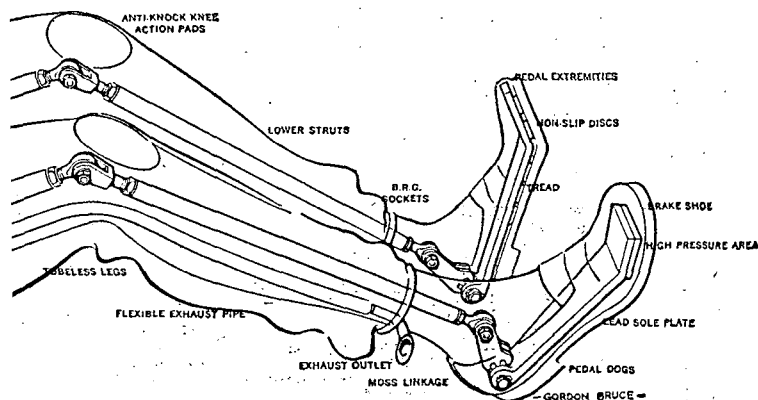
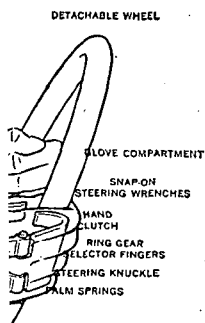
would continue despite drops in oil pressure, rises in water temperature, badly wearing tires or ominous crunchings from the gearbox.

Having no equipment to adjust speed according to the healthiness of his conveyance.

Stirling Moss MK II would continue on at full bore until he won or the ailing part shattered to pieces.

Moss's personal mechanic, Alf Francis (who everyone assumed worked on his cars) labored to inject a sense of restraint into the works. But on and on Moss went, leaving a trail of fastest laps and ruptured gearboxes across Europe. The whole thing came to a horrible climax at Spa in 1960 when a wheel parted from his Lotus at 140 mph. The driver was bent beyond repair.

While the public was informed the great man had suffered a pair of broken legs, the organization rushed into building the MK III. Construction went ahead of schedule and the motoring world was pleasantly shocked when Moss's fractures knitted in a brief five weeks.



MOSS MARK III

THE MK III is the last word. Outwardly the same as its predecessor, it is equipped with a new variable-speed computer that adjusts itself to any driving situation. Moss now only drives at the peak when necessary, thereby ending his frantic, inexorable rushes for the lead. A perfect performance came at the U.S. Grand Prize at Riverside, where he dawdled along, letting the others scrap up ahead. Then full power came on at the proper moment and he slipped by his bewildered rivals to win effortlessly.

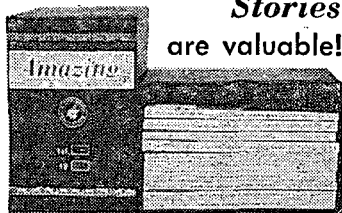
The plot was almost ruined a few years back when the R.A.C. discovered what was going on and reacted with expected huffiness. Moss had his driver's li-

cense yanked on the pretext of a traffic violation but the Club's director's were persuaded to keep silent for the good of the sport and the Commonwealth. Nonetheless the story was made public recently when a young Nassau go-karter spotted Francis replacing an oil line in Stirling's chest and blabbed to the press.

There is little reason to fear that Stirling's career will suffer now that the secret is out. Most racing authorities have accepted the revelation graciously being more shocked that such a machine works than that such a ruse was attempted. They are in general agreement that, barring mechanical difficulties, Stirling Moss MK III will be a force to be reckoned with for many years to come.

THE END

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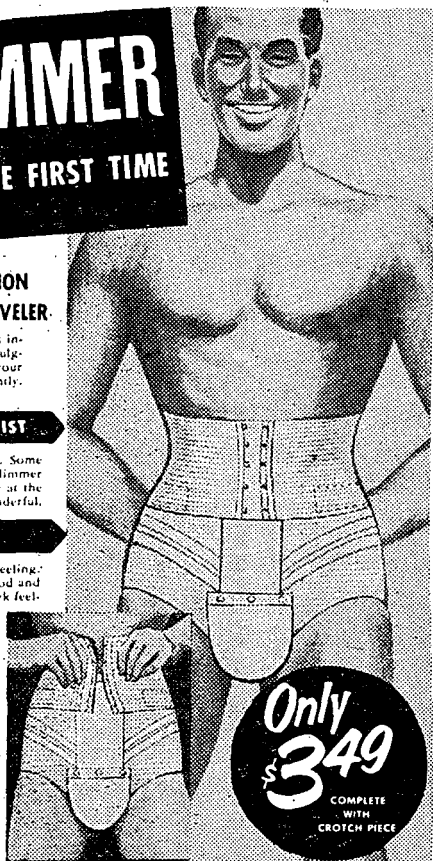
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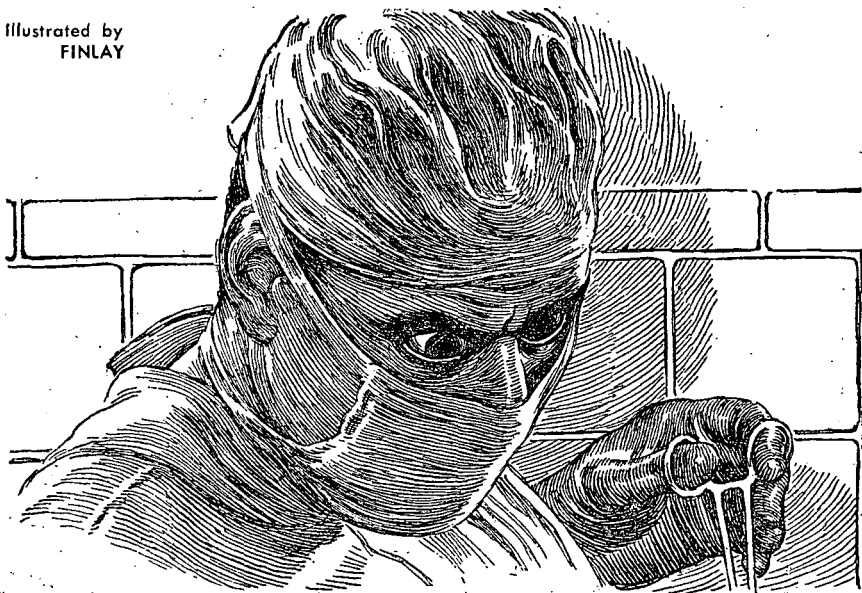
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the memory of mars

By RAYMOND F. JONES

"As soon as I'm well we'll go to Mars for a vacation again," Alice would say. But now she was dead, and the surgeons said she was not even human. In his misery, Hastings knew two things: he loved his wife; but they had never been off Earth!

A REPORTER should be objective even about a hospital. It's his business to stir others' emotions and not let his own be stirred. But that was no good, Mel Hastings told himself. No



good at all when it was Alice who was here somewhere, balanced uncertainly between life and death.

Alice had been in Surgery far too long. Something had gone wrong. He was sure of it. He glanced at his watch. It would soon be dawn outside. To Mel Hastings this marked a significant and irrevocable passage of time. If Alice were to emerge safe and whole from the white cavern of Surgery she would have done so now.

Mel sank deeper in the heavy chair, feeling a quietness within himself as if the slow creep of death were touching him also. There was a sudden far distant roar and through the window he saw a streak of brightness in the sky. That would be the tourist ship, the Martian Princess, he remembered.

That was the last thing Alice had said before they took her away from him. "As soon as I'm well again we'll go to Mars for a vacation again, and then you'll remember. It's so beautiful there. We had so much fun—"

Funny, wonderful little Alice—and her strange delusion that she still clung to, that they had taken a Martian vacation in the first year of their marriage. It had started about a year ago, and nothing he could say would shake it. Neither of them had ever been to space.

He wished now he had taken her. It would have been worth it, no matter what its personal cost. He had never told her about the phobia that had plagued him all his life, the fear of outer space that made him break out in a cold sweat just to think of it—nor of the nightmare that came again and again, ever since he was a little boy.

There must have been some way to lick this thing—to give her that vacation on Mars that she had wanted so much.

Now it was too late. He knew it was too late.

THE white doors opened, and Dr. Winters emerged slowly. He looked at Mel Hastings a long time as if trying to remember who the reporter was. "I must see you—in my office," he said finally.

Mel stared back in numb recognition. "She's dead," he said.

Dr. Winters nodded slowly as if in surprise and wonder that Mel had divined this fact. "I must see you in my office," he repeated.

Mel watched his retreating figure. There seemed no point in following. Dr. Winters had said all that need be said. Far down the corridor the Doctor turned and stood patiently as if understanding why Mel had not followed, but determined to wait until he did. The reporter stirred and rose from the chair, his legs withering

beneath him. The figure of Dr. Winters grew larger as he approached. The morning clatter of the hospital seemed an ear torturing shrillness. The door of the office closed and shut it out.

"She is dead." Dr. Winters sat behind the desk and folded and unfolded his hands. He did not look at Mel. "We did everything we could, Mr. Hastings. Her injuries from the accident were comparatively minor—" He hesitated, then went on. "In normal circumstances there would have been no question—her injuries could have been repaired."

"What do you mean, 'In normal circumstances—'?"

Dr. Winters turned his face away from Mel for a moment as if to avoid some pain beyond endurance. He passed a weary hand across his forehead and eyes and held it there a moment before speaking. Then he faced Mel again. "The woman you brought in here last night—your wife—is completely un-normal in her internal structure. Her internal organs cannot even be identified. She is like a being of some other species. She is not—she is simply not human, Mr. Hastings."

Mel stared at him, trying to grasp the meaning of the words. Meaning would not come. He uttered a short, hysterical laugh that was like a bark. "You're crazy, Doc. You've completely flipped your lid!"

Dr. Winters nodded. "For hours during the night I was in agreement with that opinion. When I first observed your wife's condition I was convinced I was utterly insane. I called in six other men to verify my observation. All of them were as stupified as I by what we saw. Organs that had no place in a human structure. Evidence of a chemistry that existed in no living being we had ever seen before—"

The Doctor's words rolled over him like a roaring surf, burying, smothering, destroying—

"I want to see." Mel's voice was like a hollow cough from far away. "I think you're crazy. I think you're hiding some mistake you made yourself. You killed Alice in a simple little operation, and now you're trying to get out of it with some crazy story that nobody on earth would ever believe!"

"I want you to see," said Dr. Winters, rising slowly. "That's why I called you in here, Mr. Hastings."

MEL trailed him down the long corridor again. No words were spoken between them. Mel felt as if nothing were real anymore.

They went through the white doors of Surgery and through the inner doors. Then they entered a white, silent—cold—room beyond.

In the glare of icy white lights a single sheeted figure rested on a table. Mel suddenly didn't want to see. But Dr. Winters was drawing back the cover. He exposed the face, the beloved features of Alice Hastings. Mel cried out her name and moved toward the table. There was nothing in her face to suggest she was not simply sleeping, her hair disarrayed, her face composed and relaxed as he had seen her hundreds of times.

"Can you stand to witness this?" asked Dr. Winters anxiously. "Shall I get you a sedative?"

Mel shook his head numbly. "No—show me . . ."

The great, fresh wound extended diagonally across the abdomen and branched up beneath the heart. The Doctor grasped a pair of small scissors and swiftly clipped the temporary sutures. With forceps and retractors he spread open the massive incision.

Mel closed his eyes against the sickness that seized him.

"Gangrene!" he said. "She's full of gangrene!"

Below the skin, the surface layers of fatty tissue, the substance of the tissue changed from the dark red of the wounded tissue to a dark and greenish hue that spoke of deadly decay.

But Dr. Winters was shaking his head. "No. It's not gangrene. That's the way we found the tis-

sue. That appears to be its—normal condition, if you will."

Mel stared without believing, without comprehending.

Dr. Winters probed the wound open further. "We should see the stomach here," he said. "What is here where the stomach should be I cannot tell you. There is no name for this organ. The intestinal tract should lie here. Instead, there is only this homogeneous mass of greenish, gelatinous material. Other organs, hardly differentiated from this mass, appear where the liver, the pancreas, the spleen should be."

Mel was hearing his voice as if from some far distance or in a dream.

"There are lungs—of a sort," the Doctor went on. "She was certainly capable of breathing. And there's a greatly modified circulatory system, two of them, it appears. One circulates a blood substance in the outer layers of tissue that is almost normal. The other circulates a liquid that gives the remainder of the organs their greenish hue. But how circulation takes place we do not know. She has no heart."

MEL HASTINGS burst out in hysterical laughter. "Now I know you're crazy Doc! My tender, loving Alice with no heart! She used to tell me, 'I haven't got any brains. I wouldn't have married a dumb reporter if I did. But

so I've got a heart and that's what fell in love with you—my heart, not my brains.' She loved me, can't you understand that?"

Dr. Winters was slowly drawing him away. "I understand. Of course I understand. Come with me now, Mr. Hastings and lie down for a little while. I'll get you something to help take away the shock."

Mel permitted himself to be led away to a small room nearby. He drank the liquid the Doctor brought, but he refused to lie down.

"You've shown me," he said with dull finality. "But I don't care what the explanation is. I knew Alice. She was human all right, more so than either you or I. She was completely normal, I tell you—all except for this idea she had the last year or so that we'd gone together on a vacation to Mars at one time."

"That wasn't true?"

"No. Neither of us had ever been out in space."

"How well did you know your wife before you married her?"

Mel smiled in faint reminiscence. "We grew up together, went to the same grade school and high school. It seems like there was never a time when Alice and I didn't know each other. Our folks lived next door for years."

"Was she a member of a large family?"

"She had an older brother and sister and two younger sisters."

"What were her parents like?"

"They're still living. Her father runs an implement store. It's a farm community where they live. Wonderful people. Alice was just like them."

Dr. Winters was silent before he went on. "I have subjected you to this mental torture for just one reason, Mr. Hastings. If it has been a matter of any less importance I would not have told you the details of your wife's condition, much less asking you to look at her. But this is such an enormous scientific mystery that I must ask your cooperation in helping to solve it. I want your permission to preserve and dissect the body of your wife for the cause of science."

Mel looked at the Doctor in sudden sharp antagonism. "Not even give her a burial? Let her be put away in bottles, like—like a —"

"Please don't upset yourself any more than necessary. But I do beg that you consider what I've just proposed. Surely a moment's reflection will show you that this is no more barbaric than our other customs regarding our dead."

"But even this is beside the point. The girl, Alice, whom you married is like a normal human being in every apparent external respect, yet the organs which

gave her life and enabled her to function are like nothing encountered before in human experience. It is imperative that we understand the meaning of this. It is yours to say whether or not we shall have this opportunity."

Mel started to speak again, but the words wouldn't come out.

"Time is critical," said Dr. Winters, "but I don't want to force you to an instantaneous answer. Take thirty minutes to think about it. Within that time, additional means of preservation must be taken. I regret that I must be in such haste, but I urge that your answer be yes."

Dr. Winters moved towards the door, but Mel gestured for him to remain.

"I want to see her again," Mel said.

"There is no need. You have been tortured enough. Remember your wife as you have known her all her life, not as you saw her a moment ago."

"If you want my answer let me see her again."

Dr. Winters led the way silently back to the cold room. Mel drew down the cover only far enough to expose the face of Alice. There was no mistake. Somehow he had been hoping that all this would turn out to be some monstrous error. But there was no error.

Would she want me to do what the Doctor has asked? he

thought. She wouldn't care. She would probably think it a very huge joke that she had been born with innards that made her different from everybody else. She would be amused by the profound probings and mutterings of the learned doctors trying to find an explanation for something that had no explanation.

Mel drew the sheet tenderly over her face.

"You can do as you wish," he said to Dr. Winters. "It makes no difference to us—to either of us."

THE sedative Dr. Winters had given him, plus his own exhaustion, drove Mel to sleep for a few hours during the afternoon, but by evening he was awake again and knew that a night of sleeplessness lay ahead of him. He couldn't stand to spend it in the house, with all its fresh reminders of Alice.

He walked out into the street as it began to get dark. Walking was easy; almost no one did it any more. The rush of private and commercial cars swarmed overhead and rumbled in the ground beneath. He was an isolated anachronism walking silently at the edge of the great city.

He was sick of it. He would have liked to have turned his back on the city and left it forever. Alice had felt the same. But there was nowhere to go. News reporting was the only thing he

knew, and news occurred only in the great, ugly cities of the world. The farmlands, such as he and Alice had known when they were young, produced nothing of interest to the satiated denizens of the towns and cities. Nothing except food, and much of this was now being produced by great factories that synthesized protein and carbohydrates. When fats could be synthesized the day of the farmer would be over.

He wondered if there weren't some way out of it now. With Alice gone there was only himself, and his needs were few. He didn't know, but suddenly he wanted very much to see it all again. And, besides, he had to tell her folks.

THE ancient surface bus reached Central Valley at noon the next day. It all looked very much as it had the last time Mel had seen it and it looked very good indeed. The vast, open lands; the immense ripe fields.

The bus passed the high school where Mel and Alice had attended classes together. He half expected to see her running across the campus lawn to meet him. In the middle of town he got off the bus and there were Alice's mother and father.

They were dry-eyed now but white and numb with shock. George Dalby took his hand and pumped it heavily. "We can't

realize it, Mel. We just can't believe Alice is gone."

His wife put her arms around Mel and struggled with her tears again. "You didn't say anything about the funeral. When will the it be?"

Mel swallowed hard, fighting the one lie he had to tell. He almost wondered now why he had agreed to Dr. Winters' request. "Alice—always wanted to do all the good she could in the world," he said. "She figured that she could be of some use even after she was gone. So she made an agreement with the research hospital that they could have her body after she died."

It took a moment for her mother to grasp the meaning. Then she cried out, "We can't even bury her?"

"We should have a memorial service, right here at home where all her friends are," said Mel.

George Dalby nodded in his grief. "That was just like Alice," he said. "Always wanting to do something for somebody else—"

And it was true, Mel thought. If Alice had supposed she was not going to live any longer she would probably have thought of the idea, herself. Her parents were easily reconciled.

They took him out to the old familiar house and gave him the room where he and Alice had spent the first days of their marriage.

WHEN it was night and the lights were out he felt able to sleep naturally for the first time since Alice's accident. She seemed not far away here in this old familiar house.

In memory, she was not, for Mel was convinced he could remember the details of his every association with her. He first became conscious of her existence one day when they were in the third grade. At the beginning of each school year the younger pupils went through a course of weighing, inspection, knee tapping, and cavity counting. Mel had come in late for his examination that year and barged into the wrong room. A shower of little-girl squeals had greeted him as the teacher told him kindly where the boy's examination room was:

But he remembered most vividly Alice Dalby standing in the middle of the room, her blouse off but held protectingly in front of her as she jumped up and down in rage and pointed a finger at him. "You get out of here, Melvin Hastings! You're not a nice boy at all!"

Face red, he had hastily retreated as the teacher assured Alice and the rest of the girls that he had made a simple mistake. But how angry Alice had been! It was a week before she would speak to him.

He smiled and sank back deep-

ly into the pillow. He remembered how proud he had been when old Doc Collins, who came out to do the honors every Fall, had told him there wasn't a thing wrong with him and that if he continued to drink his milk regularly he'd grow up to be a football player. He could still hear Doc's words whistling through his teeth and feel the coldness of the stethoscope on his chest.

Suddenly, he sat upright in bed in the darkness.

Stethoscope!

They had tapped and inspected and listened to Alice that day, and all the other examination days.

If Doc Collins had been unable to find a heartbeat in her he'd have fainted—and spread the news all over town!

Mel got up and stood at the window, his heart pounding. Old Doc Collins was gone, but the medical records of those school examinations might still be around somewhere. He didn't know what he expected to prove, but surely those records would not tell the same story Dr. Winters had told.

It took him nearly all the next day. The grade school principal agreed to help him check through the dusty attic of the school, where ancient records and papers were tumbled about and burst from their cardboard boxes.

Then Paul Ames, the school

Board secretary, took Mel down to the District Office and offered to help look for the records. The old building was stifling hot and dusty with summer disuse. But down in the cool, cobwebbed basement they found it. . . . Alice's records from the third grade on up through the ninth. On every one: heart, o.k. lungs, normal. Pulse and blood pressure readings were on each chart.

"I'd like to take these," said Mel. "Her doctor in town—he wants to write some kind of paper on her case and would like all the past medical history he can get."

Paul Ames frowned thoughtfully. "I'm not allowed to give District property away. But they should have been thrown out a long time ago—take 'em and don't tell anybody I let you you have 'em."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot," Mel said.

And when she was fourteen or fifteen her appendix had been removed. A Dr. Brown had performed the operation, Mel remembered. He had taken over from Collins.

"Sure, he's still here," Paul Ames said. "Same office old Doc Collins used. You'll probably find him there right now."

Dr. Brown remembered. He didn't remember the details of the appendectomy, but he still had records that showed a completely normal operation.

"I wonder if I could get a copy of that record and have you sign it," Mel said. He explained about the interest of Dr. Winters in her case without revealing the actual circumstances.

"Glad to," said Dr. Brown. "I just wish things hadn't turned out the way they have. One of the loveliest girls that ever grew up here, Alice."

The special memorial service was held in the old community church on Sunday afternoon. It was like the drawing of a curtain across a portion of Mel's life, and he knew that curtain would never open again.

He took a bus leaving town soon after the service.

There was one final bit of evidence, and he wondered all the way back to town why he had not thought of it first. Alice's pregnancy had ended in miscarriage, and there had never been another.

But X-rays had been taken to try to find the cause of Alice's difficulty. If they showed that Alice was normal within the past two years—

DR. WINTERS was mildly surprised to see Mel again. He invited the reporter in to his office and offered him a chair. I suppose you have come to inquire about our findings regarding your wife."

"Yes—if you've found anything," said Mel. "I've got a couple of things to show you."

"We've found little more than we knew the night of her death. We have completed the dissection of the body. A minute analysis of each organ is now under way, and chemical tests of the body's substances are being made. We found that differences in the skeletal structure were almost as great as those in the fleshy tissues. We find no relationship between these structures and those of any other species—human or animal—that we have ever found."

"And yet Alice was not always like that," said Mel.

Dr. Winters looked at him sharply. "How do you know that?"

Mel extended the medical records he had obtained in Central Valley. Dr. Winters picked them up and examined them for a long time while Mel watched silently.

Finally, Dr. Winters put the records down with a sigh. "This seems to make the problem even more complex than it was."

"There are X-rays, too," said Mel. "Alice had pelvic X-rays only a little over two years ago. I tried to get them, but the doctor said you'd have to request them. They should be absolute proof that Alice was different then."

"Tell me who has them and I'll send for them at once."

An hour later Dr. Winters

shook his head in disbelief as he turned off the light box and removed the X-ray photograph. "It's impossible to believe that these were taken of your wife, but they corroborate the evidence of the other medical records. They show a perfectly normal structure."

The two men remained silent across the desk, each reluctant to express his confused thoughts. Dr. Winters finally broke the silence. "It must be, Mr. Hastings," he said, "—it must be that this woman—this utterly alien person—is simply not your wife, Alice. Somehow, somewhere, there must be a mistake in identity, a substitution of similar individuals."

"She was not out of my sight," said Mel. "Everything was completely normal when I came home that night. Nothing was out of place. We went out to a show. Then, on the way home, the accident occurred. There could have been no substitution—except right here in the hospital. But I know it was Alice I saw. That's why I made you let me see her again—to make sure."

"But the evidence you have brought me proves otherwise. These medical records, these X-rays prove that the girl, Alice, whom you married, was quite normal. It is utterly impossible that she could have metamorphosed into the person on whom we operated."

Mel stared at the reflection of the sky in the polished desk top. "I don't know the answer," he said. "It must not be Alice. But if that's the case, where is Alice?"

"That might even be a matter for the police," said Dr. Winters. "There are many things yet to be learned about this mystery."

"There's one thing more," said Mel. "Fingerprints. When we first came here Alice got a job where she had to have her fingerprints taken."

"Excellent!" Dr. Winters exclaimed. "That should give us our final proof!"

It took the rest of the afternoon to get the fingerprint record and make a comparison. Dr. Winters called Mel at home to give him the report. There was no question. The fingerprints were identical. The corpse was that of Alice Hastings.

THE nightmare came again that night. Worse than Mel could ever remember it. As always, it was a dream of space, black empty space, and he was floating alone in the immense depths of it. There was no direction. He was caught in a whirlpool of vertigo from which he reached out with agonized yearning for some solidarity to cling to.

There was only space.

After a time he was no longer alone. He could not see them, but

he knew they were out there. The searchers. He did not know why he had to flee or why they sought him, but he knew they must never overtake him, or all would be lost.

Somehow he found a way to propel himself through empty space. The searchers were growing points of light in the far distance. They gave him a sense of direction. His being, his existence, his universe of meaning and understanding depended on the success of his flight from the searchers. Faster, through the wild black depths of space—

He never knew whether he escaped or not. Always he awoke in a tangle of bedclothes, bathed in sweat; whimpering in fear. For a long time Alice had been there to touch his hand when he awoke. But Alice was gone now and he was so weary of the night pursuit. Sometimes he wished it would end with the searchers—whoever they were—catching up with him and doing what they intended to do. Then maybe there would be no more nightmare. Maybe there would be no more Mel Hastings, he thought. And that wouldn't be so bad, either.

He tossed sleeplessly the rest of the night and got up at dawn feeling as if he had not been to bed at all. He would take one day more, and then get back to the News Bureau. He'd take this day to do what couldn't be put off any longer—the collecting and dispo-



sition of Alice's personal belongings.

HE shaved, bathed and dressed, then began emptying the drawers, one by one. There were many souvenirs, mementos. She was always collecting these. Her bottom drawer was full of stuff that he'd glimpsed only occasionally.

In the second layer of junk in the drawer he came across the brochure on Martian vacations. It must have been one of the dreams of her life, he thought. She'd wanted it so much that she'd almost come to believe that it was real. He turned the pages of the smooth, glossy brochure. Its cover bore the picture of the great Martian Princess and the blazoned emblem of Connemorra Space Lines. Inside were glistening photos of the plush interior of the great vacation liner, and pictures of the domed cities of Mars where Earthmen played more than they worked. Mars had become the great resort center of Earth.

Mel closed the book and glanced again at the Connemorra name. Only one man had ever amassed the resources necessary to operate a private space line. Jim Connemorra had done it; no one knew quite how. But he operated now out of both hemispheres with a space line that ignored freight and dealt only in passenger busi-

ness. He made money, on a scale that no government operated line had yet been able to approach.

Mel sank down to the floor, continuing to shift through the other things in the drawer.

His hand stopped. He remained motionless as recognition showed sudden frantic questions in his mind. There lay a ticket envelope marked Connemorra Lines.

The envelope was empty when he looked inside, and there was no name on it. But it was worn. As if it might have been carried to Mars and back.

In sudden frenzy he began examining each article and laying it in a careless pile on the floor. He recognized a pair of idiotic Martian dolls. He found a tourist map of the ruined cities of Mars—He found a menu from the Red Sands Hotel.

And below all these there was a picture album. Alice at the Red Sands. Alice at the Phobos oasis. Alice at the Darnella Ruins. He turned the pages of the album with numb fingers. Alice in a dozen Martian settings. Some of them were dated. About two years ago. They had gone together, Alice had said, but there was no evidence of Mel's presence on any such trip.

But it was equally impossible that Alice had made the trip, yet here was proof. Proof that swept him up in a doubting of his own

senses. How could such a thing have taken place? Had he actually made such a trip and been stripped of the memory by some amnesia? Maybe he had forced himself to go with her and the power of his lifelong phobia had wiped it from his memory.

And what did it all have to do—if anything—with the unbelievable thing Dr. Winters had found about Alice?

Overcome with grief and exhaustion he sat fingering the mementos aimlessly while he stared at the pictures and the ticket envelope and the souvenirs.

DR. WINTERS spoke a little more sharply than he intended. "I don't think anything is going to be solved by a wild-geese chase to Mars. It's going to cost you a great deal of money, and there isn't a single positive lead to any solution."

"It's the only possible explanation," Mel persisted. "Something happened on Mars to change her from what she once was to—what you saw on your operating table."

"And you are hoping that in some desperate way you will find there was a switch of personalities—that there may be a ghost of a chance of finding Alice still alive."

Mel bit his lip. He was scarcely willing to admit such a hope but it was the foundation of his decision. "I've got to do what I can,"

he said. "I must take the chance. The uncertainty will torment me all my life if I don't."

Dr. Winters shook his head. "I still wish I could persuade you against it. You will find only disappointment."

"My mind is made up. Will you help me or not?"

"What can I do?"

"I can't go into space unless I can find some way of lifting, even temporarily, this phobia that nearly drives me crazy at the thought of going out there. Isn't there a drug, a hypnotic method, or something to help a thing like this?"

"This isn't my field," said Dr. Winters. "But I suspect that the cause of your trouble cannot be suppressed. It will have to be lifted. Psycho-recovery is the only way to accomplish that. I can recommend a number of good men. This, too, is very expensive."

"I should have done it for Alice—long ago," said Mel.

DR. MARTIN, the psychiatrist, was deeply interested in Mel's problem. "It sounds as if it is based on some early trauma, which has long since been wiped from your conscious memory. Recovery may be easy or difficult, depending on how much suppression of the original event has taken place."

"I don't even care what the original event was," said Mel, "if

you rid me of this overwhelming fear of space. Dr. Winters said he thought recovery would be required."

"He is right. No matter how much overlay you pile on top of such a phobia to suppress it, it will continue to haunt you. We can make a trial run to analyze the situation, and then we can better predict the chance of ultimate success."

As a reporter, Mel Hastings had had vague encounters with the subject of psycho-recovery, but he knew little of the details about it. He knew it involved some kind of a machine that could tap the very depths of the human mind and drag out the hidden debris accumulated in mental basements and attics. But such things had always given him the willies. He steered clear of them.

When Dr. Martin first introduced him into the psycho-recovery room his resolution almost vanished. It looked more like a complex electronic laboratory than anything else. A half dozen operators and assistants in nurses' uniforms stood by.

"If you will recline here—," Dr. Martin was saying.

Mel felt as if he were being prepared for some inhuman biological experiment. A cage of terminals was fitted to his head and a thousand small electrodes adjusted to contact with his skull. The faint hum of equipment sup-

ported the small surge of apprehension within him.

After half an hour the preparations were complete. The level of lights in the room was lowered. He could sense the operators at their panels and see dimly the figure of Dr. Martin seated near him.

"Try to recall as vividly as possible your last experience with this nightmare you have described. We will try to lock on to that and follow it on down."

This was the last thing in the world Mel wanted to do. He lay in agonized indecision, remembering that he had dreamed only a short time ago, but fighting off the actual recollection of the dream.

"Let yourself go," Dr. Martin said kindly. "Don't fight it—"

A fragment of his mind let down its guard for a brief instant. It was like touching the surface of a whirlpool. He was sucked into the sweeping depths of the dream. He sensed that he cried out in terror as he plunged. But there was no one to hear. He was alone in space.

Fear wrapped him like black, clammy fur. He felt the utter futility of even being afraid. He would simply remain as he was, and soon he would cease to be.

But they were coming again. He sensed, rather than saw them. The searchers. And his fear of them was greater than his fear of

space alone. He moved. Somehow he moved, driving headlong through great vastness while the pinpoints of light grew behind him.

"Very satisfactory," Dr. Martin was saying. "An extremely satisfactory probe."

His voice came through to Mel as from beyond vast barriers of time and space. Mel felt the thick sweat that covered his body. Weakness throbbed in his muscles.

"It gives us a very solid anchor point," Dr. Martin said. "From here I think we run back to the beginning of the experience and unearth the whole thing. Are you ready, Mr. Hastings?"

Mel felt too weak to nod. "Let'er rip!" he muttered weakly.

THE day was warm and sunny. He and Alice had arrived early at the spaceport to enjoy the holiday excitement preceding the takeoff. It was something they had both dreamed of since they were kids—a vacation in the fabulous domed cities and ruins of Mars.

Alice was awed by her first close view of the magnificent ship lying in its water berth that opened to Lake Michigan. "It's *huge*—how can such an enormous ship ever get off the Earth?"

Mel laughed. "Let's not worry about that. We know it does. That's all that matters." But he

could not help being impressed, too, by the enormous size and the graceful lines of the luxury ship. Unlike Alice, he was not seeing it at close range for the first time. He had met the ship scores of times in his reporting job, interviewing famous and well-known personages as they departed or arrived from the fabulous playgrounds of Mars.

"If you look carefully," Mel pointed out, "you'll see a lot of faces that make news when they come and go."

Alice's face glowed as she clung to Mel's arm and recognized some of the famous citizens who would be their fellow passengers. "This is going to be the most fun we've ever had in our lives, darling."

"Like a barrel of monkeys," Mel said casually, enjoying the bubbling excitement that was in Alice.

The ship was so completely stabilized that the passengers did not even have to sit down during takeoff. They crowded the ports to watch the land and the water shoot past as the ship skimmed half the length of Lake Michigan in its takeoff run. As it bore into the upper atmosphere on an ever increasing angle of climb, its own artificial gravity system took over and gave the illusion of horizontal flight with the Earth receding slowly behind.

Mel and Alice wandered through the salons and along the

spacious decks as if in some fairyland-come-true. All sense of time seemed to vanish and they floated with the great ship in timeless, endless space.

He wasn't quite certain when he first became aware of his own sense of disquietude. It seemed to result from a change in the members of the crew. On the morning of the third day they ceased their universal and uninterrupted concern for their passengers' entertainment and enjoyment.

Most of the passengers seemed to have taken no note of it. Mel commented to Alice. She laughed at him. "What do you expect? They've spent two full days showing us the ship and teaching us to play all the games aboard. You don't expect them to play nurse to us during the whole trip, do you?"

It sounded reasonable. "I suppose so," said Mel dubiously. "But just what *are* they doing? They all seem to be in such a hurry to get somewhere this morning."

"Well, they must have some duties to perform in connection with running the ship."

Mel shook his head in doubt.

Alice joined him in wandering about the decks, kibitzing on the games of the other passengers, and watching the stars and galaxies on the telescopic screens. It was on one of

these that they first saw the shadow out in space. Small at first, the black shadow crossed a single star and made it wink. That was what caught Mel's attention, a winking star in the dead night of space.

When he was sure, he called Alice's attention to it. "There's something moving out there." By now it had shape, like a tiny black bullet.

"Where? I don't see anything."

"It's crossing that patch of stars. Watch, and you can see it blot them out as it moves."

"It's another ship!" Alice exclaimed. "That's exciting! To think we're passing another ship in all this great emptiness of space! I wonder where it's coming from?"

"And where it's going to."

They watched its slow, precise movement across the stars. After several minutes a steward passed by. Mel hailed him and pointed to the screen. "Can you tell us what that other ship is?"

The steward glanced and seemed to recognize it instantly. But he paused in replying. "That's the Mars liner," he said finally. "In just a few minutes the public address system will announce contact and change of ship."

"Change of ship?" Mel asked, puzzled. "I never heard anything about a change of ship."

"Oh, yes," the steward said.

"This is only the shuttle that we're on now. We transfer to the liner for the remainder of the trip. I'm sure that was explained to you at the time you purchased your tickets." He hurried away.

Mel was quite sure no such thing had been explained to him when he purchased tickets. He turned back to the screen and watched the black ship growing swiftly larger now as it and the Martian Princess approached on contact courses.

The public address system came alive suddenly. "This is your Captain. All passengers will now prepare to leave the shuttle and board the Mars liner. Hand luggage should be made ready. All luggage stowed in the hold will be transferred without your attention. It has been a pleasure to have you aboard. Contact with the liner will be made in fifteen minutes."

From the buzz around him Mel knew that this was as much a surprise to everyone else as it was to him, but it was greeted with excitement and without question.

Even Alice was growing excited now and others crowded around them when it was discovered what they were viewing. "It looks *big*," said Alice in subdued voice. "Bigger than this ship by far."

Mel moved away and let the others have his place before the screen. His sense of uneasiness

increased as he contemplated the approach of that huge black ship. And he was convinced its color *was* black, that it was not just the monotone of the view screen that made it so.

Why should there be such a transfer of passengers in mid-space? The Martian Princess was certainly adequate to make the journey to Mars. Actually they were more than a third of the way there, already. He wasn't sure why he felt so certain something was amiss. Surely there was no possibility that the great Connemorra Lines would plan any procedure to the detriment of the more than five thousand passengers aboard the ship. His uneasiness was pretty stupid, he thought.

But it wouldn't go away.

He returned to the crowd clustered at the viewing screen and took Alice by the arm to draw her away.

She looked quizzically at him. "This is the most exciting thing yet. I want to watch it."

"We haven't got much time," Mel said. "We've got a lot of things to get in our suitcases. Let's go down to our stateroom."

"Everyone else has to pack, too. There's no hurry."

"Fifteen minutes, the Captain said. We don't want to be the last ones."

Unwillingly, Alice followed. Their stateroom was a long way

from the salon. The fifteen minutes were almost up by the time they reached it.

MEL closed the door to their room and put his hands on Alice's shoulders. He glanced about warily. "Alice—I don't want to go aboard that ship. There's something wrong about this whole thing. I don't know what it is, but we're not going aboard."

Alice stared at him. "Have you lost your mind? After all our hopes and all our planning you don't want to go on to Mars?"

Mel felt as if a wall had suddenly sprung up between them. He clutched Alice's shoulders desperately in his hands. "Alice—I don't think that ship out there is going to Mars. I know it sounds crazy, but please listen to me—we weren't told anything about the Martian Princess being merely a shuttle and that we'd transfer to another ship out here. No one was told. The Martian Princess is a space liner perfectly capable of going to Mars. There's no reason why such a huge ship should be used merely as a shuttle."

"That ship out there is bigger."

"Why? Do we need any more room to finish the journey?"

Alice shook herself out of his grasp. "I don't know the answers to those questions and I don't care to know them!" she said angrily.

"If you think I'm going to give up this vacation and turn right around here in space and go back home you're crazy. If you go back you'll go back alone!"

Alice whirled and ran to the door. Mel ran after her, but she was through the door and was melting into the moving throng by the time he reached the door. He took a step to follow, then halted. He couldn't drag her forcibly back into the stateroom. Maybe she'd return in a few minutes to pack her bags. He went back in the room and closed the door.

EVEN as he did so he knew that he was guessing wrong. Alice would be matching him in a game of nerves. She'd go on to the other ship, expecting him to pack the bags and follow. He sat down on the bed and put his head in his hands for a moment. A faint shudder passed through the ship and he heard the hollow ring of clashing metal. The unknown ship had made contact with the Martian Princess. Their airlocks were being mated now.

From the porthole he could see the incredible mass of the ship. He crossed the room and pressed the curtains aside. His impression had been right. The ship *was* black. Black, nameless, and blind. No insignia or portholes were visible anywhere on the hull within his range of vision.

He didn't know what he was going to do, but he knew above all else that he wasn't going to board that ship. He paced the floor telling himself it was a stupid, neurotic apprehension that filled his mind, that the great Connemorra Lines could not be involved in any nefarious acts involving five thousand people—or even one person. They couldn't afford such risk.

He couldn't shake it. He was certain that, no matter what the cost, he was not going to board that black ship.

He looked about the stateroom. He couldn't remain here. They'd certainly find him. He had to hide somewhere. He stood motionless, staring out the porthole. There was no place he could hide with assurance inside the ship.

But what about outside?

His thoughts crumpled in indecision as he thought of Alice. Yet whatever the black ship meant, he could help no one if he went aboard. He had to get back to Earth and try to find out what it was all about and alert the authorities. Only in that way could he hope to help Alice.

HE opened the stateroom door cautiously and stepped out. The corridor was filled with hurrying passengers, carrying hand luggage, laughing with each other in excitement. He joined them, moving slowly, alert for crew

members. There seemed to be none of the latter in the corridors.

Keeping close to the wall, he moved with the crowd until he reached the rounded niche that marked an escape chamber. As if pushed by the hurrying throng, he backed into it, the automatic doors opening and closing to receive him.

The chamber was one of scores stationed throughout the ship as required by law. The escape chambers contained space suits for personal exit from the ship in case of emergency. They were never expected to be used. In any emergency requiring abandonment of the vessel it would be as suicidal to go into space in a suit as to remain with the ship. But fusty lawmakers had decreed their necessity, and passengers received a perfunctory briefing in the use of the chambers and the suits—which they promptly forgot.

Mel wrestled now with what he remembered of the instructions. He inspected a suit hanging in its cabinet and then was relieved to find that the instructions were repeated on a panel of the cabinet. Slowly, he donned the suit, following the step by step instructions as he went. He began to sweat profusely from his exertions and from his fear of discovery.

He finally succeeded in getting

the cumbersome gear adjusted and fastened without being detected. He did not know if the airlock of the chamber had some kind of alarm that would alert the crew when it was opened. That was a chance he had to take. He discovered that it was arranged so that it could be opened only by a key operated from within the suit. This was obviously to prevent anyone leaving the ship unprotected. Perhaps with this safeguard there was no alarm.

He twisted the lock and entered the chamber. He opened the outer door and faced the night of space.

He would not have believed that anything could be so utterly terrifying. His knees buckled momentarily and left him clinging to the side of the port. Sweat burst anew from every pore. Blindly, he pressed the jet control and forced himself into space.

He arced a short distance along the curve of the ship and then forced himself down into contact with the hull. He clung by foot and hand magnetic pads, sick with nausea and vertigo.

He had believed that by clinging to the outside of the hull he could escape detection and endure the flight back to Earth. In his sickness of body and mind the whole plan now looked like utter folly. He retched and closed his eyes and lay on the hull through the beginning of an eternity.

HE had no concept of time. The chronometer in the suit was not working. But it seemed as if many hours had passed when he felt a faint shock pass through the hull beneath him. He felt a momentary elation. The ships had separated. The search for him—if any—had been abandoned.

Slowly he inched his way around the hull to get a glimpse of the black ship. It was still there, standing off a few hundred yards but not moving. Its presence dismayed him. There could be no reason now for the two ships to remain together. The Martian Princess should be turning around for the return to Earth.

Then out of the corner of his eye he saw it. A trace of movement. A gleam of light. Like a small moon it edged up the distant curvature of the hull. Then there were more—a nest of quivering satellites.

Without thought, Mel pressed the jet control and hurled himself into space.

The terror of his first plunge was multiplied by the presence of the searchers. Crewmen of the Martian Princess, he supposed. The absence of the space suit had probably been discovered.

In headlong flight, he became aware of eternity and darkness and loneliness. The sun was a hot, bright disc, but it illuminated nothing. All that his mind clung

to for identification of itself and the universe around it was gone. He was like a primeval cell, floating without origin, without purpose, without destination.

Only a glimmer of memory pierced the thick terror with a shaft of rationality. Alice. He must survive for Alice's sake. He must find the way back to Alice—back to Earth.

He looked toward the Martian Princess and the searchers on the hull. He cried out in the soundless dark. The searchers had left the hull and were pursuing him through open space. Their speed far exceeded his. It was futile to run before them—and futile to leave the haven of the Martian Princess. His only chance of survival or success lay in getting to Earth aboard the ship. In a long curve he arced back toward the ship. Instantly, the searchers moved to close in the arc and meet him on a collision course.

He could see them now. They were not crewmen in spacesuits as he had supposed. Rather, the objects—two of them—looked like miniature spaceships. Beams of light bore through space ahead of them, and he suspected they carried other radiations also to detect by radar and infra red.

In the depths of his mind he knew they were not of the Martian Princess. Nor were there any crewmen within them. They were robot craft of some kind, and

they had come from the great black ship.

He felt their searching beams upon him and waited for a deadly, blasting burst of heat or killing radiation. He was not prepared for what happened.

THEY closed swiftly, and the nearest robot came within a dozen feet, matching Mel's own velocity. Suddenly, from a small opening in the machine, a slender metal tentacle whipped out and wrapped about him like the coils of a snake. The second robot approached and added another binding. Mel's arms and legs were pinned. Frantically, he manipulated the jet control in the glove of the suit. This only caused the tentacles to cut deeply and painfully, and threatened to smash the shell of the suit. He cut the jets and admitted the failure of his frantic mission.

In short minutes they were near the ships again. Mel wondered what kind of reprimand the crewmen of the Martian Princess could give him, and what fantastic justification they might offer for their own actions.

But he wasn't being taken toward the Martian Princess. He twisted painfully in the grip of the robot tentacles and confirmed that he was being carried to the black stranger.

Soundlessly, a port slid open and the robots swept him through

into the dark interior of the ship. He felt himself dropped on a hard metal floor. The tentacles unwound. Alone, he struggled to his feet and flashed a beam of light from the suit flashlight to the walls about him. Walls, floor and ceiling were an indistinguishable dark gray. He was the only object in the chamber.

While he strained his sight to establish features in the blank metallic surfaces a clipped, foreign voice spoke. "Remove your suit and walk toward the opening in the wall. Do not try to run or attack. You will not be harmed unless you attack."

There was no use refusing. He did as commanded. A bright doorway opened in the wall before him. He walked through.

It reminded him of a medical laboratory. Shelves and cabinets of hand instruments and electronic equipment were about. And in the room three men sat watching the doorway through which he entered. He gazed at the strangers as they at him.

They looked ordinary enough in their white surgeons' smocks. All seemed to be of middle age, with dark hair turning gray at the fringe. One was considerably more muscular than the other two. One leaned to overweight. The third was quite thin. Yet Mel felt himself bristling like a dog in the dark of the moon.

No matter how ordinary they

looked, these three were not men of Earth. The certainty of this settled like a cold, dead weight in the pit of his stomach.

"You—" he stammered. There was nothing to say.

"Please recline on this couch," the nearest, the muscular one said. "We wish you no harm so do not be afraid. We wish only to determine if you have been harmed by your flight into space."

All three of them were tense and Mel was sure they were worried—by his escapade. Had he nearly let some unknown cat out of the bag?

"Please—" the muscular one said.

He had no alternative. He might struggle, and destroy a good deal of apparatus, but he could not hope to overwhelm them. He lay on the couch as directed. Almost instantly the overweight one was behind him, seizing his arm. He felt the sting of a needle. The thin one was at his feet, looking down at him soberly. "He will rest," the thin one said, "and then we shall know what needs to be done."

The sleep had lasted for an eon, he thought. He had a sense of the passage of an enormous span of time when he at last awoke. His vision was fuzzy, but there was no mistaking the image before him.

Alice. His Alice—safe.

She was sitting on the edge of the bed, smiling down at him. He fought his way up to a half-sitting position. "Alice!" He wept.

Afterwards, he said, "Where are we? What happened? I remember so many crazy things—the vacation to Mars."

"Don't try to remember it all, darling," she said. "You were sick. Some kind of hysteria and amnesia hit you while we were there. We're home now. You'll soon be out of the hospital and everything will be all right."

"I spoiled it," he murmured. "I spoiled it all for you."

"No. I knew you were going to be all right. I even had a lot of fun all by myself. But we're going back. As soon as you are all well again we'll start saving up and go again."

He nodded drowsily. "Sure. We'll go to Mars again and have a real vacation."

Alice faded away. All of it faded away.

AS if from a far distance the walls of Dr. Martin's laboratory seemed to close about him and the lights slowly increased. Dr. Martin was seated beside him, his head shaking slowly. "I'm so terribly sorry, Mr. Hastings. I thought we were going to get the full and true event this time. But it often happens, as in your case, that fantasy lies upon

fantasy, and it is necessary to dig through great layers of them before uncovering the truth. I think, however, that we shall not have to go much deeper to find the underlying truth for you."

Mel lay on the couch, continuing to stare at the ceiling. "Then there was no great, black ship out of space?"

"Of course not! That is one danger of these analyses, Mr. Hastings. You must not be deceived into believing that a newly discovered fantasy is the truth for which you were looking. You must come back and continue your search."

"Yes. Yes, of course." He got up slowly and was helped to the outer room by the Doctor and an attendant. The attendant gave him a glass of white, sweetish substance to drink.

"A booster-upper," laughed Dr. Martin. "It takes away the grogginess that sometimes attends such a deep sweep. We will look for you day after tomorrow."

Mel nodded and stepped out into the hall.

No great black ship.

No mysterious little robot ships with tentacles that whip out and capture a man.

No strange trio in surgeons' gowns.

And no Alice—

A sudden spear of thought pierced his mind. Maybe all that

was illusion, too. Maybe he could go home right now and find her waiting for him. Maybe—

No. That was real enough. The accident. Dr. Winters. The scene in the icy room next to Surgery at the hospital. Dr. Martin didn't know about that. He would have called that a fantasy, too, if Mel had tried to tell him.

No. It was all real.

The unbelievable, alien organs of Alice.

The great, black ship.

The mindless robot searchers.

His nightmare had stemmed from all this that had happened out in space, which had somehow been wiped from his conscious memory. The nightmare had not existed in his boyhood, as he had thought. It was oriented in time now.

But what had happened to Alice? There was no clue in the memory unearthed by Dr. Martin. Was her condition merely the result of some freak heredity or gene mutation?

The surging turmoil in his mind was greater than before. There was only one way to quiet it—that was to carry out his original plan to go to Mars.

He'd go out there again. He'd find out if the black ship existed or not.

THE girl in the ticket office was kind but firm. "Our records show that you were a vaca-

tioner to Mars very recently. The demand is so great and the ship capacity so small that we must limit vacation trips to no more than one in any ten-year period."

He turned away and went down the hall and out the doorway of the marble and brass Connemorra Lines Building.

He walked through town for six blocks and the thought of old Jake Norton came to his mind. Jake had been an old timer in the city room when Mel was a cub. Jake had retired just a few months ago and lived in a place in town with a lot of other old men. Mel hailed the nearest cab and drove to Jake's place.

"Mel, it's great to see you!" Jake said. "I didn't think any of the boys would remember an old man after he'd walked out for the last time."

"People remember real easy when they want favors."

"Sure," Jake said with a grin, "but there's not much of a favor I can do you any more, boy. Can't even loan you a ten until next payday."

"Jake, you can help me," said Mel. "You don't expect to ever take a trip to Mars, do you?"

"Mars! Are you crazy, Mel?"

"I went once. I've got to go again. It's about Alice. And they won't let me, I didn't know you could go only once in ten years."

Jake remembered. Alice had called him and all the other boys

after they'd come back the other time. Mel had been sick, she said. He wouldn't remember the trip. They were asked not to say anything about it. Now Mel was remembering and wanted to go again. Jake didn't know what he should do.

"What can I do to help you?" he asked.

"I'll give you the money. Buy a ticket in your name. I'll go as Jake Norton. I think I can get away with it. I don't think they make any closer check than that."

"Sure—if it'll do you any good," Jake said hesitantly. He was remembering the anxiety in Alice's voice the day she called and begged him not to say anything that would remind Mel of Mars. No one ever had, as far as Jake knew.

He took the money and Mel waited at the old men's home. An hour later Jake called. "Eight months is the closest reservation I can get at normal rates, but I know of some scalpers who charge 50% more."

Mel groaned. "Buy it no matter what the cost! I've got to go at once." He would be broke for the next ten years.

IT was little different from the other time. There was the same holiday excitement in the crowd of vacationers and those who had come to see them off. It was the same ship, even.

All that was different was the absence of Alice.

He stayed in his stateroom and didn't watch the takeoff. He felt the faint rocking motion as the ship went down its long waterway. He felt the shift as the artificial gravity took over. He lay on the bed and closed his eyes as the Martian Princess sought the cold night of space.

For two days he remained in the room, emerging only for meals. The trip itself held no interest for him. He waited only for the announcement that the black ship had come.

But by the end of the second day it had not come. Mel spent a sleepless night staring out at the endless horizon of stars. Dr. Martin had been right, he thought. There was no black ship. He had merely substituted one illusion for another. Where was reality? Did it exist anywhere in all the world?

Yet, even if there were no black ship, his goal was still Mars.

The third day passed without the appearance of the black ship. But on the very evening of that day the speaker announced: "All passengers will prepare for transfer from the shuttle ship to the Mars liner. Bring hand luggage —"

Mel sat paralyzed while he listened to the announcement. So it was true! He felt the faint jar that rocked the Martian Princess

as the two ships coupled. From his stateroom port Mel could see the stranger, black, ugly, and somehow deadly. He wished he could show Dr. Martin this "illusion"!

He packed swiftly and left the room. Mel joined the surprised and excited throng now, not hanging back, but eager to find out the secret of the great black ship.

The transition from one ship to the other was almost imperceptible. The structure of both corridors was the same, but Mel knew when the junction was crossed. He sensed the entry into a strange world that was far different from the common one he knew.

Far down the corridor the crowd was slowing, forming into lines before stewards who were checking tickets. The passengers were shunted into branching corridors leading to their own staterooms. So far everything was so utterly normal that Mel felt an overwhelming despondency. It was just as they had been told; they were transferring to the Mars liner from the shuttle.

The steward glanced at his ticket, held it for a moment of hesitation while he scanned Mel's face. "Mr. Norton—please come with me."

The steward moved away in a direction no other passengers were taking. Another steward moved up to his place. "That

way," the second man said to Mel. "Follow the steward."

MEL'S heart picked up its beat as he stepped out of the line and moved slowly down the corridor after the retreating steward. They walked a long way through branching silent corridors that showed no sign of life.

They stopped at last before a door that was like a score of others they had passed. There were no markings. The steward opened the door and stood aside. "In here please," he said. Mel entered and found himself alone. The steward remained outside.

The room was furnished as an office. It was carpeted and paneled luxuriously. A door leading from a room at his left opened and admitted a tall man with graying hair. The man seemed to carry an aura of power and strength as he moved. An aura that Mel Hastings recognized.

"James Connemorra!" Mel exclaimed.

The man bowed his head slightly in acknowledgement. "Yes, Mr. Hastings," he said.

Mel was dismayed. "How do you know who I am?" he said.

James Connemorra looked through the port beside Mel and at the stars beyond. "I have been looking for you long enough I ought to know who you are."

Something in the man's voice chilled Mel. "I have been easy

enough to find. I'm only a news reporter. Why have you been looking for me?"

Connemorra sank into a deep chair on the opposite side of the room. "Can't you guess?" he said.

"It has something to do with what happened—before?" Mel asked. He backed warily against the opposite wall from Connemorra. "That time when I escaped from the Martian Princess rather than come aboard the black ship?"

Connemorra nodded. "Yes."

"I still don't understand. Why?"

"It's an old story." Connemorra shrugged faintly. "A man learns too much about things he should know nothing of."

"I have a right to know what happened to my wife. You know about her don't you?"

Connemorra nodded.

"What happened to her? Why was she different after her trip to Mars?"

James Connemorra was silent for so long that Mel thought he had not heard him. "Is everyone different when they get back?" Mel demanded. "Does something happen to everybody who takes the Mars trip, the same thing that happened to Alice?"

"You learned so much," said Connemorra, speaking as if to himself, "I had to hunt you down and bring you here."

"What do you mean by that?"

I came through my own efforts. Your office tried to stop me."

"Yet I knew who you were and that you were here. I must have had something to do with it, don't you think?"

"What?"

"I forced you to come by deception, so that no one knows you are here—except the old man whose name you used. Who will believe him that you came on the Martian Princess? Our records will show that a Jake Norton will be there on Earth. No one can ever prove that Mel Hastings ever came aboard."

MEL let his breath out slowly. His fear suddenly swallowed caution. He took a crouching step forward. Then he stopped, frozen. James Connemorra tilted the small pistol resting in his lap. Mel did not know how it came to be there. He had not seen it a moment ago.

"What are you going to do?" Mel demanded. "What are you going to do with all of us?"

"You know too much," said Connemorra, shrugging in mock helplessness. "What *can* I do with you?"

"Explain what I don't understand about the things you say I know."

"Explain to you?" The idea seemed to amuse Connemorra greatly, as if it had some utterly ridiculous aspect. "Yes, I might

as well explain," he said. "I haven't had anyone interested enough to listen for a long time.

"Men have never been alone in space. We have been watched, inspected, and studied periodically since Neanderthal times by races in the galaxy who have preceded us in development by hundreds of thousands of years. These observers have been pleasantly excited by some of the things we have done, appalled by others.

"There is a galactic organization that has existed for at least a hundred thousand years. This organization exists for the purpose of mutual development of the worlds and races of the galaxy. It also exists to maintain peace, for there were ages before its organization when interstellar war took place, and more than one great world was wiped out in such senseless wars.

"When men of Earth were ready to step into space, the Galactic Council had to decide, as it had decided on so many other occasions, whether the new world was to be admitted as a member. The choice is not one which a new world is invited to make; the choice is made for it. A world which begins to send its ships through space becomes a member of the Council, or its ships cease to travel. The world itself may cease to exist."

"You mean this dictatorial Council determines whether a

world is fit to survive and actually wipes out those it decides against?" gasped Mel in horror. "They set themselves up as judges in the Universe?"

"That's about the way they operate, to put it bluntly," said Connemorra. "You can call them a thousand unpleasant names, but you can't change the fact of their existence, nor the fact of their successful operation for a period as long as the age of the human race.

"They would never have made their existence known to us if we had not begun sending our ships into space. But once we did that we were entering territory staked out by races that were there when we crawled out of our caves. Who can say what their rights are?"

"But to pass judgment on entire worlds—"

"We have no choice but to accept that such judgment is passed."

"And their judgment of Earth—?"

"Was that Earth was not ready for Council membership. Earthmen are still making too many blunders to join creatures that could cross the galaxy at the speed of light when we were learning how to chip flint."

"But they didn't wipe us out!"

JAMES CONNEMORRA looked out at the stars. "I wonder," he said. "I wonder—"

"What do you mean?" Mel said in a tight voice.

"We have defects which are not quite like any they have encountered before. We have developed skills in the manufacture of artifacts, but we have no capacity for using them. For example, we have developed vast systems of communication, but these systems have not improved our communications they have actually blocked communication."

"That's crazy!" said Mel. "Do they suppose smoke signals are superior to the 3-d-screens in our homes?"

"As a matter of fact, they do. And so do I. When a man must resort to smoke signals he is very certain that he has something to say before he goes to the trouble of putting the message in the air. But our fabulous screens prevent us from communicating with each other by throwing up a wall of pseudo-communication that we can't get through. We subject ourselves to a barrage of sound and light that has a communication content of almost zero.

"The same is true of our inventions in transportation. We have efficient means of travel to all parts of the world and now to the Universe itself. But we don't travel. We use our machines to block traveling."

"I can understand the first argument, but not this one!" said Mel.

"We move our bodies to new locations with our machines, but our minds remain at home. We take our rutted thoughts, our predispositions, our cultural concepts wherever we go. We do not touch, even with a fragment of our minds, that which our machines give us contact with. We do not travel. We move in space, but we do not travel.

"This is their accusation. And they're right. We are still doing what we have always done. We are using space flight for the boring, the trivial, the stupid; using genius for a toy, like a child banging an atomic watch on the floor. It happened with all our great discoveries and inventions: the gasoline engine, the telephone, the wireless. We've built civilizations of monumental stupidity on the wonders of nature. One race of the Galactics has a phrase they apply to people like us: 'If there is a God in Heaven He has wept for ten thousand years.'

BUT all this is not the worst. A race that is merely stupid seldom gets out to space. But ours has something else they fear: destructiveness. They have plotted our history and extrapolated our future. If they let us come out, war and conflict will follow."

"They can't know that!"

"They say they can. We are in no position to argue."

"So they plan to destroy us—"

"No. They want to try an experiment that has been carried out just a few times previously. They are going to reduce us from what they term the critical mass which we have achieved."

"Critical mass? That's a nuclear term."

"Right. Meaning ready to blow up. That's where we are. Two not-so-minor nuclear wars in fifty years. They see us carrying our destructiveness into space, fighting each other there, infecting other races with our hostility. But if we are broken down into smaller groups, have the tools of war removed, and are forced to take another line of development—well, they have hopes of salvaging us."

"But they can't do a thing like that to us! What do they intend? Taking groups of Earthmen, deporting them to other worlds—breaking them apart from each other forever—?"

The coldness found its resting place in Mel's chest. He stared at James Connemorra. Then his eyes moved slowly over the walls of the room in the black ship and out to the stars. The black ship.

"This ship—! You transfer your passengers to this Galactic ship for deportation to other worlds! But they come back—"

"They are sent to colonies on other worlds where conditions are like those on Earth—with

significant exceptions. The colonies are small, the largest are only a few thousand. The problems there are different than on Earth—and they are tough. The natural resources are not the same. The development of the resulting cultures will be vastly different from that of Earth. The Galactic Council is very interested in the outcome—which will not be known with certainty for a thousand years or so."

"But they come back," Mel repeated. "You bring them back!"

"For each Earthman who goes out, a replacement is sent back. The replacement is an android supplied by the Council."

"Android!" Mel felt his reason slipping. He knew he was shouting. "Then Alice—the Alice that died was an android, she was not my wife! My Alice is still alive! You can take me to her—"

Connemorra nodded. "Alice is still alive, and well. No harm has come to her."

"Take me to her!" Mel knew he was pleading, but in his anguish he had no pride.

Connemorra seemed to ignore his plea. "Earth's population is slowly being diluted by the removal of top people. The androids behave in every way like the individuals they replace, but they are preconditioned against the inherent destructiveness of Earthmen."

Blind anger seemed to rise

within Mel. "You have no right to separate me from Alice. Take me to her!"

His rage ignited and he leaped forward.

The small gun in Connemorra's hand spurted twice. Mel felt a double impact in a moment of great wonder. It couldn't end like this, he thought. It couldn't end without his seeing Alice once more. Just once more—

HE SANK to the floor. The pain was not great, but he knew he was dying. He looked down at his hand that covered the great wound in his mid-section. There was something wrong.

He felt the stickiness, but the red blood was not welling out. Instead, a thick bubble of green ooze moved from the wound and spread over his clothes and his hand. An alien greenness that was like nothing human.

He had seen it once before. Alice.

He stared up at Connemorra with wide, wondering eyes.

"Everything went wrong, my poor android," said Connemorra softly. "After your human was brought back to the ship we were forced to go through with the usual process of imprinting his mind content upon his android. But we had to wipe out all memory of the attempted escape from the Martian Princess. This was

not successful. It still clung in the nightmares you experienced. And the psycho-recovery brought it all back.

"We tried to cover it with an amnesiac condition instead of the usual pre-printed memory of a Mars vacation. And all this might have worked if the Alice android had not been defective also. A normal android has protective mechanisms that make accidents and subsequent discovery impossible. But the Alice android failed, and you set out on a course to uncover us. I, had to find a way to destroy you—murder.

"I'm truly sorry. I don't know how an android thinks or feels. Sometimes I'm afraid of all of you. You are like men, but I've seen the factories in which you are produced. There are many things I do not know. I know only that I had to obey the Galactic Council or Earth would have been destroyed long ago.

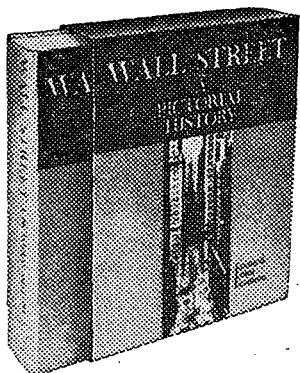
"And something else I know: Alice and Mel Hastings are content and happy. They are on a lovely world, very much like Central Valley."

He closed his eyes as he felt the life—or whatever it was—seeping out of him. It came out right, after all, he thought.

Like a wooden soldier with a painted smile, fallen from a shelf, he lay twisted upon the floor.

THE END

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the **STAR HYACINTHS**

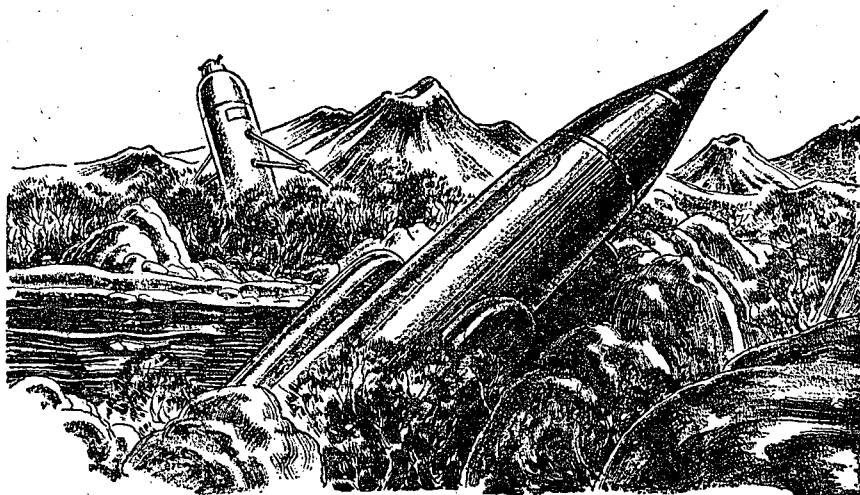
By **JAMES H. SCHMITZ**

Illustrated by **FINLAY**

On a bleak, distant uncharted world two ships lay wrecked and a lone man stared at a star hyacinth. Its brilliance burned into his retina . . . and he knew that men could easily kill and kill for that one beauty alone.

THE robbery of the Dosey Asteroids Shipping Station in a remote and spottily explored section of space provided the news-casting systems of the Federa-

tion of the Hub with one of the juiciest crime stories of the season. In a manner not clearly explained, the Dosey Asteroids Company had lost six months'





production of gem-quality cut star hyacinths valued at nearly a hundred million credits. It lost also its Chief Lapidary and seventy-eight other company employees who had been in the station dome at the time.

All these people appeared at first to have been killed by gunfire, but a study of their bodies revealed that only in a few instances had gun wounds been the actual cause of death. For the most part the wounds had been inflicted on corpses, presumably in an attempt to conceal the fact that disaster in another and unknown form had befallen the station.

The raiders left very few clues. It appeared that the attack on the station had been carried out by a single ship, and that the locks to the dome had been opened from within. The latter fact, of course, aroused speculation, but led the investigators nowhere.

Six years later the great Dosey Asteroids robbery remained an unsolved mystery.

THE two wrecked spaceships rested almost side by side near the tip of a narrow, deep arm of a great lake.

The only man on the planet sat on a rocky ledge three miles uphill from the two ships, gazing broodingly down at them. He was a big fellow in neatly patched shipboard clothing. His hands

were clean, his face carefully shaved. He had two of the cast-away's traditional possessions with him; a massive hunting bow rested against the rocks, and a minor representative of the class of life which was this world's equivalent of birds was hopping about near his feet. This was a thrush-sized creature with a jaunty bearing and bright yellow eyes. From the front of its round face protruded a short, narrow tube tipped with small, sharp teeth. Round, horny knobs at the ends of its long toes protected retractile claws as it bounded back and forth between the bow and the man, giving a quick flutter of its wings on each bound. Finally it stopped before the man, stretching its neck to stare up at him, trying to catch his attention.

He roused from his musing, glanced irritably down at it.

"Not now, Birdie," he said. "Keep quiet!"

The man's gaze returned to the two ships, then passed briefly along a towering range of volcanos on the other side of the lake, and lifted to the cloudless blue sky. His eyes probed on, searching the sunlit, empty vault above him. If a ship ever came again, it would come from there, the two wrecks by the lake arm already fixed in its detectors; it would not come gliding along the surface of the planet. . . .

Birdie produced a sharp, plaintive whistle. The man looked at it.

"Shut up, stupid!" he told it.

He reached into the inner pocket of his coat, took out a small object wrapped in a piece of leather, and unfolded the leather.

Then it lay in his cupped palm, and blazed with the brilliance of twenty diamonds, seeming to flash the fires of the spectrum furiously from every faceted surface, without ever quite subduing the pure violet luminescence which made a star hyacinth impossible to imitate or, once seen, to forget. The most beautiful of gems, the rarest, the most valuable. The man who was a castaway stared at it for long seconds, his breath quickening and his hand beginning to tremble. Finally he folded the chip of incredible mineral back into the leather, replaced it carefully in his pocket.

When he looked about again, the sunlit air seemed brighter, the coloring of lake and land more vivid and alive. Once during each of this world's short days, but no oftener, he permitted himself to look at the star hyacinth. It was a ritual adhered to with almost religious strictness, and it had kept him as sane as he was ever likely to be again, for over six years.

It might, he sometimes

thought, keep him sane until a third ship presently came along to this place. And then . . .

The third ship was coming along at the moment, still some five hours' flight out from the system. She was a small ship with lean, rakish lines, a hot little speedster, gliding placidly through subspace just now, her engines throttled down.

Aboard her, things were less peaceful.

THE girl was putting up a pretty good fight but getting nowhere with it against the bull-necked Fleetman who had her pinned back against the wall.

Wellan Dasinger paused in momentary indecision at the entrance to the half-darkened control section of the speedboat. The scuffle in there very probably was none of his business. The people of the roving Independent Fleets had their own practices and mores and resented interference from uniformed planet dwellers. For all Dasinger knew, their blue-eyed lady pilot enjoyed roughhousing with the burly members of her crew. If the thing wasn't serious. . . .

He heard the man rap out something in the Willata Fleet tongue, following the words up with a solid thump of his fist into the girl's side. The thump hadn't been playful, and her sharp gasp of pain indicated no enjoyment

whatever. Dasinger stepped quickly into the room.

He saw the girl turn startled eyes toward him as he came up behind the man. The man was Liu Taunus, the bigger of the two crew members . . . too big and too well muscled by a good deal, in fact, to make a sportsmanlike suggestion to divert his thumpings to Dasinger look like a sensible approach. Besides Dasinger didn't know the Willata Fleet's language. The edge of his hand slashed twice from behind along the thick neck; then his fist brought the breath whistling from Taunus' lungs before the Fleetman had time to turn fully towards him.

It gave Dasinger a considerable starting advantage. During the next twenty seconds or so the advantage seemed to diminish rapidly. Taunus' fists and boots had scored only near misses so far, but he began to look like the hardest big man to chop down Dasinger had yet run into. And then the Fleetman was suddenly sprawling on the floor, face down, arms flung out limply, a tough boy with a thoroughly bludgeoned nervous system.

Dasinger was straightening up when he heard the *thunk* of the wrench. He turned sharply, discovered first the girl standing ten feet away with the wrench in her raised hand, next their second crew member lying on the

carpet between them, finally the long, thin knife lying near the man's hand.

"Thanks, Miss Mines!" he said, somewhat out of breath. "I really should have remembered Calat might be somewhere around."

Duomart Mines gestured with her head at the adjoining control cabin. "He was in there," she said, also breathlessly. She was a long-legged blonde with a limber way of moving, pleasing to look at in her shaped Fleet uniform, though with somewhat aloof and calculating eyes. In the dim light of the room she seemed to be studying Dasinger now with an expression somewhere between wariness and surprised speculation. Then, as he took a step forward to check on Calat's condition, she backed off slightly, half lifting the wrench again.

Dasinger stopped and looked at her. "Well," he said, "make up your mind! Whose side are you on here?"

Miss Mines hesitated, let the wrench down. "Yours, I guess," she acknowledged. "I'd better be, now! They'd murder me for helping a planeteer."

DASINGER went down on one knee beside Calat, rather cautiously though the Fleetman wasn't stirring, and picked up the knife. Miss Mines turned up the room's lights. Dasinger

asked, "What was this . . . a mutiny? You're technically in charge of the ship, aren't you?"

"Technically," she agreed, added, "We were arguing about a Fleet matter."

"I see. We'll call it mutiny." Dasinger checked to be sure Calat wasn't faking unconsciousness. He inquired, "Do you really need these boys to help you?"

Duomart Mines shook her blond head. "Not at all. Flying the Mooncat is a one-man job."

"I did have a feeling," Dasinger admitted, "that Willata's Fleet was doing a little featherbedding when they said I'd have to hire a crew of three to go along with their speedboat."

"Uh-huh." Her tone was non-committal. "They were. What are you going to do with them?"

"Anywhere they can be locked up safely?"

"Not safely. Their own cabin's as good as anything. They can batter their way out of here if they try hard enough. Of course we'd hear them doing it."

"Well, we can fix that." Dasinger stood up, fished his cabin key out of a pocket and gave it to her. "Tan suitcase standing at the head of my bunk," he said. "Mind bringing that and the little crane from the storeroom up here?"

Neither of the Fleetman had begun to stir when Duomart Mines came riding a gravity

crane back in through the door a couple of minutes later, the suitcase dangling in front of her. She halted the crane in the center of the room, slid out of its saddle with a supple twist of her body, and handed Dasinger his cabin key.

"Thanks." Dasinger took the suitcase from the crane, unlocked and opened it. He brought out a pair of plastic handcuffs, aware that Miss Mines stood behind him making an intent scrutiny of what could be seen of the suitcase's contents. He didn't blame her for feeling curious; she was looking at a variety of devices which might have delighted the eyes of both a professional burglar and military spy. She offered no comment.

Neither did Dasinger. He hauled Liu Taunus over on his back, fastened handcuffs about the Fleetman's wrists, then rolled him over on his face again. He did the same for Calat, hung the suitcase back in the crane, slung a leg across the crane's saddle and settled into it.

Miss Mines remarked, "I'd look their cabin over pretty closely for guns and so on before leaving them there."

"I intend to. By the way, has Dr. Egavine mentioned how close we are to our destination?" Dasinger maneuvered the crane over to Taunus, lowered a beam to the small of the Fleetman's

back and hoisted him up carefully, arms, head and legs dangling.

The blond girl checked her watch. "He didn't tell me exactly," she said, "but there's what seems to be a terraprox in the G-2 system ahead. If that's it, we'll get there in around five hours depending on what sub-space conditions in the system are. Dr. Egavine's due up here in thirty minutes to give me the final figures." She paused, added curiously, "Don't you know yourself just where we're going?"

"No," Dasinger said. "I'm financing the trip. The doctor is the man with the maps and other pertinent information."

"I thought you were partners."

"We are, Dr. Egavine is taciturn about some things. I'll bring him back here with me as soon as I have these two locked away." Dasinger finished picking up Calat, swung the crane lowly towards the door, the unconscious Fleetmen suspended ahead of him.

DR. Egavine stood at the open door to his stateroom as Dasinger came walking back up the passage from the crew quarters and the storage. Quist, the doctor's manservant, peered out of the stateroom behind him.

"What in heaven's name were you doing with those two men?" Egavine inquired, twitching his

eyebrows disapprovingly up and down. The doctor was a tall, thin man in his forties, dressed habitually in undertaker black, with bony features and intense dark eyes. He added, "They appeared to be unconscious . . . and fettered!"

"They were both," Dasinger admitted. "I've confined them to their cabin."

"Why?"

"We had a little slugfest in the control section a few minutes ago. One of the boys was beating around on our pilot, so I laid him out, and she laid out the other one when he tried to get into the act with a knife. She says the original dispute was a Fleet matter . . . in other words, none of our business. However, I don't know. There's something decidedly fishy about the situation."

"In what way?" Egavine asked.

Dasinger said, "I checked over the crew quarters for weapons just now and found something which suggests that Willata's Fleet is much more interested in what we're doing out here than we thought."

Egavine looked startled, peered quickly along the passage to the control section. "I feel," he said, lowering his voice, "that we should continue this discussion behind closed doors. . . ."

"All right." Quist, a bandy-legged, wiry little man with a

large bulb of a nose and close-set, small eyes, moved back from the door. Dasinger went inside. Evagine pulled the door shut behind them and drew a chair out from the cabin table. Dasinger sat down opposite him.

"What did you find?" Dr. Egavine asked.

Dasinger said, "You know Miss Mines is supposed to be the only Fleet member on board who speaks the Fédération's translingue. However, there was a listening device attached to the inside of the cabin communicator in the crew quarters. Its setting show that the Willata Fleet people have bugged each of the Mooncat's other cabins, and also—which I think is an interesting point—the control section. Have you and Quist discussed our project in any detail since coming aboard?"

"I believe we did, on several occasions," Egavine said hesitantly.

"Then we'd better assume Taunus and Calat knew that we're looking for the wreck of the Dosey Asteroids raider, and . . ."

Egavine put a cautioning finger to his lips. "Should we . . .?"

"Oh, no harm in talking now," Dasinger assured him. "I pulled the instrument out and dropped it in my cabin. Actually, the thing needn't be too serious if we stay on guard. But of course we

shouldn't go back to the Fleet station after we have the stuff. Gadgetry of that kind suggests bad intentions . . . also a rather sophisticated level of criminality for an I-Fleet. We'll return directly to the Hub. We might have to go on short rations for a few weeks, but we'll make it. And we'll keep those two so-called crew members locked up."

The doctor cleared his throat. "Miss Mines . . ."

"She doesn't appear to be personally involved in any piratical schemes," Dasinger said. "Otherwise they wouldn't have bugged her cabin and the control rooms. If we dangle a few star hyacinths before her eyes, she should be willing to fly us back. If she balks, I think I can handle the Mooncat well enough to get us there."

Dr. Egavine tugged pensively at his ear lobe. "I see." His hand moved on toward his right coat lapel. "What do you think of . . ."

"Mind watching this for a moment, doctor?" Dasinger interrupted. He nodded at his own hand lying on the table before him.

"Watch . . .?" Egavine began questioningly. Then his eyes went wide with alarm.

Dasinger's hand had turned suddenly sideways from the wrist, turned up again. There was a small gun in the hand now,

its stubby muzzle pointing up steadily at Egavine's chest.

"Dasinger! What does . . ."

"Neat trick, eh?" Dasinger commented. "Sleeve gun. Now keep quiet and hold everything just as it is. If you move or Quist over there moves before I tell you to, you've had it, doctor!"

HE reached across the table with his left hand, slipped it beneath Egavine's right coat lapel, tugged sharply at something in there, and brought out a flat black pouch with a tiny spray needle projecting from it. He dropped the pouch in his pocket, said, "Keep your seat, doctor," stood up and went over to Quist. Quist darted an anxious glance at his employer, and made a whimpering sound in his throat.

"You're not getting hurt," Dasinger told him. "Just put your hands on top of your head and stand still. Now let's take a look at the thing you started to pull from your pocket a moment ago . . . Electric stunsap, eh? That wasn't very nice of you, Quist! Let's see what else—

"Good Lord, Egavine," he announced presently, "your boy's a regular armory! Two blasters, a pencil-beam, a knife, and the sap . . . All right, Quist. Go over and sit down with the doctor." He watched the little man move dejectedly to the table, then

fitted the assorted lethal devices carefully into one of his coat pockets, brought the pouch he had taken from Egavine out of the other pocket.

"Now, doctor," he said, "let's talk. I'm unhappy about this. I discovered you were carrying this thing around before we left Mezmiali, and I had a sample of its contents analyzed. I was told it's a hypnotic with an almost instantaneous effect both at skin contact and when inhaled. Care to comment?"

"I do indeed!" Egavine said frigidly. "I have no intention of denying that the instrument is a hypnotic spray. As you know, I dislike guns and similar weapons, and we are engaged in a matter in which the need to defend myself against a personal attack might arise. Your assumption, however, that I intended to employ the spray on you just now is simply ridiculous!"

"I might be chuckling myself," Dasinger said, "if Quist hadn't had the sap halfway out of his pocket as soon as you reached for your lapel. If I'd ducked from the spray, I'd have backed into the sap, right? There's a little too much at stake here, doctor. You may be telling the truth, but just in case you're nourishing unfriendly ideas—and that's what it looks like to me—I'm taking a few precautions."

Dr. Egavine stared at him, his

mouth set in a thin, bitter line. Then he asked, "What kind of precautions?"

Dasinger said, "I'll keep the hypnotic and Quist's bag of dirty tricks until we land. You might need those things on the planet but you don't need them on ship-board. You and I'll go up to the control section now to give Miss Mines her final flight directions. After that, you and Quist stay in this cabin with the door locked until the ship has set down. I don't want to have anything else to worry about while we're making the approach. If my suspicions turn out to be unjustified, I'll apologize . . . after we're all safely back in the Hub."

WHAT was your partner looking so sour about?" Duomart Mines inquired a little later, her eyes on the flight screens. "Have a quarrel with him?"

Dasinger, standing in the entry to the little control cabin across from her, shrugged his shoulders.

"Not exactly," he said. "Egavine tried to use a hypno spray on me."

"Hypno spray?" the young woman asked.

"A chemical which induces an instantaneous hypnotic trance in people. Leaves them wide open to suggestion. Medical hypnotists make a lot of use of it. So do criminals."

She turned away from the control console to look at him. "Why would your partner want to hypnotize you?"

"I don't know," Dasinger said. "He hasn't admitted that he intended to do it."

"Is he a criminal?"

"I wouldn't say he isn't," Dasinger observed judiciously, "but I couldn't prove it."

Duomart puckered her lips, staring at him thoughtfully. "What about yourself?" she asked.

"No, Miss Mines, I have a very high regard for the law. I'm a simple businessman."

"A simple businessman who flies his own cruiser four weeks out from the Hub into I-Fleet territory?"

"That's the kind of business I'm in," Dasinger explained. "I own a charter ship company."

"I see," she said. "Well, you two make an odd pair of partners. . . ."

"I suppose we do. Incidentally, has there been any occasion when you and Dr. Egavine—or you and Dr. Egavine and his servant—were alone somewhere in the ship together? For example, except when we came up here to give you further flight instructions, did he ever enter the control room?"

She shook her blond head. "No. Those are the only times I've seen him."

"Certain of that?" he asked. Duomart nodded without hesitation. "Quite certain!"

Dasinger took an ointment tube from his pocket, removed its cap, squeezed a drop of black, oily substance out on a fingertip. "Mind rolling up your sleeve a moment?" he asked. "Just above the elbow. . . ."

"What for?"

"It's because of the way those hypno sprays work," Dasinger said. "Give your victim a dose of the stuff, tell him what to do, and it usually gets done. And if you're being illegal about it, one of the first things you tell him to do is to forget he's ever been sprayed. This goop is designed for the specific purpose of knocking out hypnotic commands. Just roll up your sleeve like a good girl now, and I'll rub a little of it on your arm."

"You're not rubbing anything on my arm, mister!" Duomart told him coldly.

Dasinger shrugged resignedly, recapped the tube, and dropped it in his pocket. "Have it your way then," he remarked. "I was only . . ."

He lunged suddenly towards her.

Duomart gave him quite a struggle. A minute or two later, he had her down on the floor, her body and one arm clamped between his knees, while he unzipped the cuff on the sleeve of

the other arm and pulled the sleeve up. He brought out the tube of antihypno ointment and rubbed a few drops of the ointment into the hollow of Duomart's elbow, put the tube back in his pocket, then went on holding her down for nearly another minute. She was gasping for breath, blue eyes furious, muscles tensed.

SUDDENLY he felt her relax. An expression of stunned surprise appeared on her face. "Why," she began incredulously, "he *did* . . ."

"Gave you the spray treatment, eh?" Dasinger said, satisfied. "I was pretty sure he had."

"Why, that— At his beck and call, he says! Well, we'll just see about . . . let me up, Dasinger! Just wait till I get my hands on that bony partner of yours!"

"Now take it easy."

"Take it easy! Why should I? I . . ."

"It would be better," Dasinger explained, "if Egavine believes you're still under the influence."

She scowled up at him; then her face turned thoughtful. "Ho! You feel it isn't that he's a depraved old goat, that he's got something more sinister in mind?"

"It's a definite possibility. Why not wait and find out? The ointment will immunize you against further tricks."

Miss Mines regarded him consideringly for a few seconds, then nodded. "All right! You can let me up now. What do you think he's planning?"

"Not easy to say with Dr. Egavine. He's a devious man." Dasinger got himself disentangled, came to his feet, and reached down to help her scramble up.

"They certainly wrap you up with that hypno stuff, don't they!" she observed wonderingly.

Dasinger nodded. "They certainly do!" Then he added, "I'm keeping the doctor and his little sidekick locked up, too, until we get to the planet. That leaves you and me with the run of the ship."

Duomart looked at him. "So it does," she agreed.

"Know how to use a gun?"

"Of course. But I'm not allowed—I don't have one with me on this trip."

HE reached into his coat, took out a small gun in a fabric holster. Duomart glanced at it, then her eyes went back to his face.

"Might clip it to your belt," Dasinger said. "It's a good little shocker, fifty-foot range, safe for shipboard use. It's got a full load, eighty shots. We may or may not run into emergencies. If we don't, you'll still be more comfortable carrying it."

Duomart holstered the gun and

attached the holster to her belt. She slid the tip of her tongue reflectively out between her lips, drew it back, blinked at the flight screens for a few seconds, then looked across at Dasinger and tapped the holster at her side.

"That sort of changes things, too!" she said.

"Changes what?"

"Tell you in a minute. Sit down, Dasinger. Manual course corrections coming up. . . ." She slid into the pilot seat, moved her hands out over the controls, and appeared to forget about him.

Dasinger settled into a chair to her left, lit a cigarette, smoked and watched her, glancing occasionally at the screens. She was jockeying the Mooncat deftly in and out of the fringes of a gravitic stress knot, presently brought it into the clear, slapped over a direction lever and slid the palm of her right hand along a row of speed control buttons depressing them in turn.

NICE piece of piloting," Dasinger observed.

Duomart lifted one shoulder in a slight shrug. "That's my job." Her face remained serious. "Are you wondering why I edged us through that thing instead of going around it?"

"Uh-huh, a little," Dasinger admitted.

"It knocked half an hour off the time it should take us to get

to your planet," she said. "That is, if you'll still want to go there. We're being followed, you see."

"By whom?"

"They call her the Spy. After the Mooncat she's the fastest job in the Fleet. She's got guns, and her normal complement is twenty armed men."

"The idea being to have us lead them to what we're after, and then take it away from us?" Dasinger asked.

"That's right. I'm not supposed to know about it. You know what a Gray Fleet is?"

Dasinger nodded. "An Independent that's turned criminal."

"Yes. Willata's Fleet was a legitimate outfit up to four years ago. Then Liu Taunus and Calat and their gang took over. That happened to be the two Fleet bosses you slapped handcuffs on, Dasinger. We're a Gray Fleet now. So I had some plans of my own for this trip. If I can get to some other I-Fleet or to the Hub, I might be able to do something about Taunus. After we were down on the planet, I was going to steal the Mooncat and take off by myself."

"Why are you telling me?"

Miss Mines colored a little. "Well, you gave me the gun," she said. "And you clobbered Taunus, and got me out of that hypno thing . . . I mean, I'd have to be pretty much of a jerk to ditch you now, wouldn't I? Anyway,

now that I've told you, you won't be going back to Willata's Fleet, whatever you do. I'll still get to the Hub." She paused. "So what do you want to do now? Beat it until the coast's clear, or make a quick try for your loot before the Spy gets there?"

"How far is she behind us?" Dasinger asked.

Duomart said, "I don't know exactly. Here's what happened. When we started out, Taunus told me not to let the Mooncat travel at more than three-quarters speed for any reason. I figured then the Spy was involved in whatever he was planning; she can keep up with us at that rate, and she has considerably better detector reach than the Cat. She's stayed far enough back not to register on our plates throughout the trip.

"Late yesterday we hit some extensive turbulence areas, and I started playing games. There was this little cluster of three sun systems ahead. One of them was our target, though Dr. Egavine hadn't yet said which. I ducked around a few twistlers, doubled back, and there was the Spy coming the other way. I beat it then—top velocity. The Spy dropped off our detectors two hours later, and she can't have kept us on for more than another hour herself.

"So they'll assume we're headed for one of those three sys-

tems, but they don't know which one. They'll have to look for us. There's only one terraprox in the system we're going to. There may be none in the others, or maybe four or five. But the terraprox worlds is where they'll look because the salvage suits you're carrying are designed for ordinary underwater work. After the way I ran from them, they'll figure something's gone wrong with Taunus' plans, of course."

DASINGER rubbed his chin. "and if they're lucky and follow us straight in to the planet?"

"Then," Miss Mines said, "you might still have up to six or seven hours to locate the stuff you want, load it aboard and be gone again."

"Might have?"

She shrugged. "We've got a lead on them, but just how big a lead we finally wind up with depends to a considerable extent on the flight conditions they run in to behind us. They might get a break there, too. Then there's another very unfortunate thing. The system Dr. Egavine's directed us to now is the one we were closest to when I broke out of detection range. They'll probably decide to look there first. You see?"

"Yes," Dasinger said. "Not so good, is it?" He knuckled his jaw again reflectively. "Why was

Taunus pounding around on you when I came forward?"

"Oh, those two runches caught me flying the ship at top speed. Taunus was furious. He couldn't know whether the Spy still had a fix on us or not. Of course he didn't tell me that. The lumps he was preparing to hand out were to be for disregarding his instructions. He does things like that." She paused. "Well, are you going to make a try for the planet?"

"Yes," Dasinger said. "If we wait, there's entirely too good a chance the Spy will run across what we're after while she's snooping around for us there. We'll try to arrange things for a quick getaway in case our luck doesn't hold up."

Duomart nodded. "Mind telling me what you're after?"

"Not at all. Under the circumstances you should be told. . . .

OF course," Dasinger concluded a minute or two later, "all we'll have a legal claim to is the salvage fee."

Miss Mines glanced over at him, looking somewhat shaken. "You *are* playing this legally?"

"Definitely."

"Even so," she said, "if that really is the wreck of the Dosey Asteroids raider, and the stones are still on board . . . you two will collect something like ten million credits between you!"

"Roughly that," Dasinger agreed. "Dr. Egavine learned about the matter from one of your Willata Fleetmen."

Her eyes widened. "He what!"

"The Fleet lost a unit called Handing's Scout about four years ago, didn't it?"

"Three and a half," she said. She paused. "Handing's Scout is the other wreck down there?"

"Yes. There was one survivor . . . as far as we know. You may recall his name. Leed Farous."

Duomart nodded. "The little kwil hound. He was assistant navigator. How did Dr. Egavine . . . ?"

Dasinger said, "Farous died in a Federation hospital on Mezmi-ali two years ago, apparently of the accumulative effects of kwil addiction. He'd been picked up in Hub space in a lifeboat which we now know was one of the two on Handing's Scout."

"In Hub space? Why, it must have taken him almost a year to get that far, in one of those tubs!"

"From what Dr. Egavine learned," Dasinger said, "it did take that long. The lifeboat couldn't be identified at the time. Neither could Farous. He was completely addled with kwil . . . quite incoherent, in fact already apparently in the terminal stages of the addiction. Strenuous efforts were made to identify him because a single large star hya-

cinth had been found in the lifeboat . . . there was the possibility it was one of the stones the Dosey Asteroids Company had lost. But Farous died some months later without regaining his senses sufficiently to offer any information.

"Dr. Egavine was the physician in charge of the case, and eventually also the man who signed the death certificate. The doctor stayed on at the hospital for another year, then resigned, announcing that he intended to go into private research. Before Farous died, Egavine had of course obtained his story from him."

Miss Mines looked puzzled. "If Farous never regained his senses . . ."

"Dr. Egavine is a hypnotherapist of exceptional ability," Dasinger said. "Leed Farous wasn't so far gone that the information couldn't be pried out of him with an understanding use of drug hypnosis."

"Then why didn't others . . ."

"Oh, it was attempted. But you'll remember," Dasinger said, "that I had a little trouble getting close to you with an antihypnotic. The good doctor got to Farous first, that's all. Instead of the few minutes he spent on you, he could put in hour after hour conditioning Farous. Later comers simply didn't stand a chance of getting through to him."

DUOMART Mines was silent a moment, then asked, "Why did you two come out to the Wilata Fleet station and hire one of our ships? Your cruiser's a lot slower than the Mooncat but it would have got you here."

Dasinger said, "Dr. Egavine slipped up on one point. One can hardly blame him for it since interstellar navigation isn't in his line. The reference points on the maps he had Farous make up for him turned out to be meaningless when compared with Federation star charts. We needed the opportunity to check them against your Fleet maps. They make sense then."

"I see." Duomart gave him a sideways glance, remarked, "You know, the way you've put it, the thing's still pretty fishy."

"In what manner?"

"Dr. Egavine finished off old Farous, didn't he?"

"He may have," Dasinger conceded. "It would be impossible to prove it now. You can't force a man to testify against himself. It's true, of course, that Farous died at a very convenient moment, from Dr. Egavine's point of view."

"Well," she said, "a man like that wouldn't be satisfied with half a salvage fee when he saw the chance to quietly make away with the entire Dosey Asteroids haul."

"That could be," Dasinger said

thoughtfully. "On the other hand, a man who had committed an unprovable murder to obtain a legal claim to six million credits might very well decide not to push his luck any farther. You know the space salvage ruling that when a criminal act or criminal intent can be shown in connection with an operation like this, the guilty person automatically forfeits any claim he has to the fee."

"Yes, I know . . . and of course," Miss Mines said, "you aren't necessarily so lily white either. That's another possibility. And there's still another one. You don't happen to be a Federation detective, do you?"

Dasinger blinked. After a moment he said, "Not a bad guess. However, I don't work for the Federation."

"Oh? For whom do you work?"

"At the moment, and indirectly, for the Dosey Asteroids Company."

"Insurance?"

"No. After Farous died, Dosey Asteroids employed a detective agency to investigate the matter. I represent the agency."

"The agency collects on the salvage?"

"That's the agreement. We deliver the goods or get nothing."

"And Dr. Egavine?"

Dasinger shrugged. "If the doctor keeps his nose clean, he

stays entitled to half the salvage fee."

"What about the way he got the information from Farous?" she asked.

"From any professional viewpoint, that was highly unethical procedure. But there's no evidence Egavine broke any laws."

Miss Mines studied him, her eyes bright and quizzical. "I had a feeling about you," she said. "I . . ."

A warning burr came from the tolerance indicator; the girl turned her head quickly, said, "Cat's complaining . . . looks like we're hitting the first system stresses!" She slid back into the pilot seat. "Be with you again in a while. . . ."

WHEN Dasinger returned presently to the control section Duomart sat at ease in the pilot seat with coffee and a sandwich before her.

"How are the mutineers doing?" she asked.

"They ate with a good appetite, said nothing, and gave me no trouble," Dasinger said. "They still pretend they don't understand Federation trans-lingue. Dr. Egavine's a bit sulky. He wanted to be up front during the prelanding period. I told him he could watch things through his cabin communicator screen.

Miss Mines finished her sand-

wich, her eyes thoughtful. "I've been wondering, you know . . . how can you be sure Dr. Egavine told you the truth about what he got from Léed Farous?"

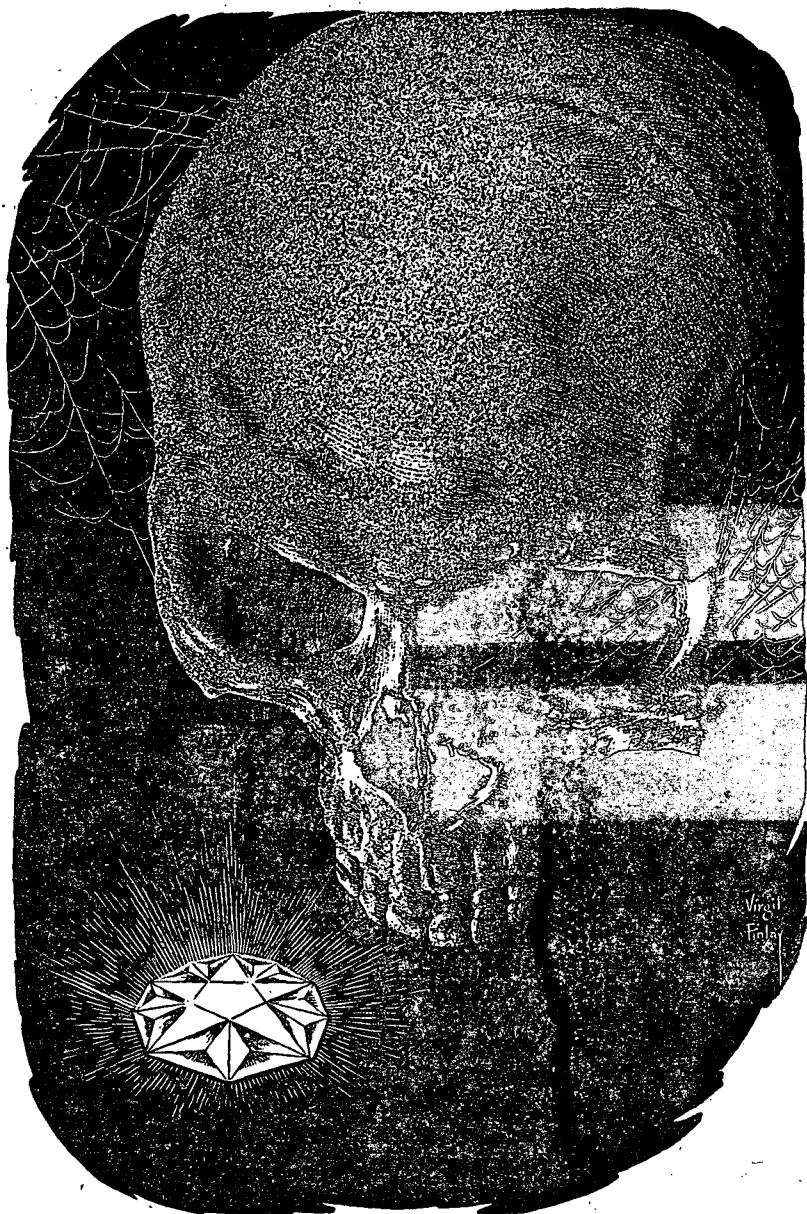
Dasinger said, "I studied the recordings Dr. Egavine made of his sessions with Farous in the hospital. He may have held back on a few details, but the recordings were genuine enough."

"So Farous passes out on a kwil jag," she said, "and he doesn't even know they're making a landing. When he comes to, the scout's parked, the Number Three drive is smashed, the lock is open, and not another soul is aboard or in sight.

"Then he notices another wreck with its lock open, wanders over, sees a few bones and stuff lying around inside, picks up a star hyacinth, and learns from the ship's records that down in the hold under sixty feet of water is a sealed compartment with a whole little crateful of the stones. . . ."

"That's the story," Dasinger agreed.

"In the Fleets," she remarked, "if we heard of a place where a couple of ship's crews seemed to have vanished into thin air, we'd call it a spooked world. And usually we'd keep away from it." She clamped her lower lip lightly between her teeth for a moment. "Do you think Dr. Egavine has considered the kwil angle?"



THE STAR HYACINTHS

Dasinger nodded. "I'm sure of it. Of course it's only a guess that the kwil made a difference for Farous. The stuff has no known medical value of any kind. But when the only known survivor of two crews happens to be a kwil-eater, the point has to be considered."

"Nobody else on Handing's Scout took kwil," Duomart said. "I know that. There aren't many in the Fleet who do." She hesitated. "You know, Dasinger, perhaps I should try it again! Maybe if I took it straight from the needle this time . . ."

Dasinger shook his head. "If the little flake you nibbled made you feel drowsy, even a quarter of a standard shot would put you out cold for an hour or two. Kwil has that effect on a lot of people. Which is one reason it isn't a very popular drug."

"What effect does it have on you?" she asked.

"Depends to some extent on the size of the dose. Sometimes it slows me down physically and mentally. At other times there were no effects that I could tell until the kwil wore off. Then I'd have hallucinations for a while—that can be very distracting, of course, when there's something you have to do. Those hangover hallucinations seem to be another fairly common reaction."

He concluded, "Since you can't take the drug and stay awake,

you'll simply remain inside the locked ship. It will be better anyway to keep the Mooncat well up in the air and ready to move most of the time we're on the planet."

"What about Taunus and Calat?" she asked.

"They come out with us, of course. If kwil is what it takes to stay healthy down there, I've enough to go around. And if it knocks them out, it will keep them out of trouble."

LOOKS like there's a fire-maker down ther!" Duomart's slim forefinger indicated a point on the ground-view plate. "Column of smoke starting to come up next to that big patch of trees! . . . Two point nine miles due north and uphill of the wrecks."

From a wall screen Dr. Egavine's voice repeated sharply, "Smoke? Then Leed Farous was not the only survivor!"

Duomart gave him a cool glance. "Might be a native animal that knows how to make fire. They're not so unusual." She went on to Dasinger. "It would take a hand detector to spot us where we are, but it does look like a distress signal. If it's men from one of the wrecks, why haven't they used the scout's other lifeboat?"

"Would the lifeboat still be intact?" Dasinger asked.

Duomart spun the ground-view plate back to the scout. "Look for yourself," she said. "It *couldn't* have been damaged in as light a crash as that one was. Those tubs are built to stand a really solid shaking up! And what else could have harmed it?"

"Farous may have put it out of commission before he left," Dasinger said. "He wanted to come back from the Hub with an expedition to get the hyacinths, so he wouldn't have cared for the idea of anyone else getting away from the planet meanwhile." He looked over at the screen. "How about it, doctor? Did Farous make any mention of that?"

Dr. Egavine seemed to hesitate an instant. "As a matter of fact, he did. Farous was approximately a third of the way to the Hub when he realized he might have made a mistake in not rendering the second lifeboat unusable. But by then it was too late to turn back, and of course he was almost certain there were no other survivors."

"So that lifeboat should still be in good condition?"

"It was in good condition when Farous left here."

"Well, whoever's down there simply may not know how to handle it."

Duomart shook her blond head decidedly. "That's out, too!" she said. "Our Fleet lifeboats all

came off an old Grand Commerce liner which was up for scrap eighty, ninety years ago. They're designed so any fool can tell what to do, and the navigational settings are completely automatic. Of course if it is a native firemaker—with mighty keen eyesight—down there, that could be different! A creature like that mightn't think of going near the scout. Should I start easing the Cat in towards the smoke, Dasinger?"

"Yes. We'll have to find out what the signal means before we try to approach the wrecks. Doctor, are you satisfied now that Miss Mines's outworld biotic check was correct?"

"The analysis appears to be fairly accurate," Dr. Egavine acknowledged, "and all detectable trouble sources are covered by the selected Fleet serum."

DASINGER said, "We'll prepare for an immediate landing then. There'll be less than an hour of daylight left on the ground, but the night's so short we'll disregard that factor." He switched off the connection to Egavine's cabin, turned to Duomart. "Now our wrist communicators, you say, have a five mile range?"

"A little over five."

"Then," Dasinger said, "we'll keep you and the Cat stationed at an exact five mile altitude ninety-

five per cent of the time we spend on the planet. If the Spy arrives while you're up there, how much time will we have to clear out?"

She shrugged. "That depends of course on how they arrive. My detectors can pick the Spy up in space before their detectors can make out the Cat against the planet. If we spot them as they're heading in, we'll have around fifteen minutes.

"But if they show up on the horizon in atmosphere, or surface her out of subspace, that's something else. If I don't move instantly then, they'll have me bracketed . . . and BLOOIE!"

Dasinger said, "Then those are the possibilities you'll have to watch for. Think you could draw the Spy far enough away in a chase to be able to come back for us?"

"They wouldn't follow me that far," Duomart said. "They know the Cat can outrun them easily once she's really stretched out, so if they can't nail her in the first few minutes they'll come back to look around for what we were interested in here." She added, "And if I *don't* let the Cat go all out but just keep a little ahead of them, they'll know that I'm trying to draw them away from something."

Dasinger nodded. In that case we'll each be on our own, and your job will be to keep right on going and get the information as

quickly as possible to the Kyth detective agency in Orado. The agency will take the matter from there."

MISS Mines looked at him. "Aren't you sort of likely to be dead before the agency can do anything about the situation?"

"I'll try to avoid it," Dasinger said. "Now, we've assumed the worst as far as the Spy is concerned. But things might also go wrong downstairs. Say I lose control of the group, or we all get hit down there by whatever hit the previous landing parties and it turns out that kwil's no good for it. It's understood that in any such event you again head the Cat immediately for the Hub and get the word to the agency. Right?"

Duomart nodded.

He brought a flat case of medical hypodermics out of his pocket, and opened it.

"Going to take your shot of kwil before we land?" Miss Mines asked.

"No. I want you to keep one of these needles on hand, at least until we find out what the problem is. It'll knock you out if you have to take it, but it might also keep you alive. I'm waiting myself to see if it's necessary to go on kwil. The hallucinations I get from the stuff afterwards could hit me while we're in the middle of some critical activity or other,

and that mightn't be so good." He closed the case again, put it away. "I think we've covered everything. If you'll check the view plate, something—or somebody—has come out from under the trees near the column of smoke. And unless I'm mistaken it's a human being."

Duomart slipped the kwil needle he'd given her into a drawer of the instrument console. "I don't think you're mistaken," she said. "I've been watching him for the last thirty seconds."

"It is a man?"

"Pretty sure of it. He moves like one."

Dasinger stood up. "I'll go talk with Egavine then. I had a job in mind for him and his hypno sprays if we happened to run into human survivors."

"Shall I put the ship down next to this one?"

"No. Land around five hundred yards to the north, in the middle of that big stretch of open ground. That should keep us out of ambushes. Better keep clear of the airspace immediately around the wrecks as you go down."

Duomart looked at him. "Darn right I'll keep clear of that area!"

Dasinger grinned. "Something about the scout?"

"Sure. No visible reason at all why the scout should have settled hard enough to buckle a drive. Handing was a good pilot."

"Hm-m-m." Dasinger rubbed his chin. "Well, I've been wondering. The Dosey Asteroids raiders are supposed to have used an unknown type of antipersonnel weapon in their attack on the station, you know. Nothing in sight on their wreck that might be, say, an automatic gun but . . . well, just move in carefully and stay ready to haul away very fast at the first hint of trouble!"

THE Mooncat slid slowly down through the air near the point where the man stood in open ground, a hundred yards from the clump of trees out of which smoke still billowed thickly upwards. The man watched the speedboat's descent quietly, making no further attempt to attract the attention of those on board to himself.

Duomart had said that the man was not a member of Handing's lost crew but a stranger. He was therefore one of the Dosey Asteroid raiders.

Putting down her two-land legs, the Mooncat touched the open hillside a little over a quarter of a mile from the woods, stood straddled and rakish, nose high. The storeroom lock opened, and a slender ramp slid out. Quist showed in the lock, dumped two portable shelters to the ground, came scrambling nimbly down the ramp. Dr. Egavine followed, more cautiously, the two

handcuffed Fleetmen behind him. Dasinger came out last, glancing over at the castaway who had started across the slope towards the ship.

"Everyone's out," he told his wrist communicator. "Take her up."

The ramp snaked soundlessly back into the lock, the lock snapped shut and the Mooncat lifted smoothly and quickly from the ground. Liu Taunus glanced after the rising speedboat, looked at Calat, and spoke loudly and emphatically in Fleetline for a few seconds, his broad face without expression. Dasinger said, "All right, Quist, break out the shelter."

When the shelter was assembled, Dasinger motioned the Fleetmen towards the door with his thumb. "Inside, boys!" he said. "Quist, lock the shelter behind them and stay on guard here. Come on, doctor. We'll meet our friend halfway. . . ."

THE castaway approached unhurriedly, walking with a long, easy stride, the bird thing on his shoulder craning its neck to peer at the strangers with round yellow eyes. The man was big and rangy, probably less heavy by thirty pounds than Liu Taunus, but in perfect physical condition. The face was strong and intelligent, smiling elatedly now.

"I'd nearly stopped hoping this day would arrive!" he said in translingue. "May I ask who you are?"

"An exploration group." Dasinger gripped the extended hand, shook it, as Dr. Egavine's right hand went casually to his coat lapel. "We noticed the two wrecked ships down by the lake," Dasinger explained, "then saw your smoke signal. Your name?"

"Graylock. Once chief engineer of the Antares, out of Vanadia on Aruaque." Graylock turned, still smiling, towards Egavine.

Egavine smiled as pleasantly.

"Graylock," he observed, "you feel, and will continue to feel, that this is the conversation you planned to conduct with us, that everything is going exactly in accordance with your wishes." He turned his head to Dasinger; inquired, "Would you prefer to question him yourself, Dasinger?"

Dasinger hesitated, startled; but Graylock's expression did not change. Dasinger shook his head. "Very smooth, doctor!" he commented. "No, go ahead. You're obviously the expert here."

"Very well . . . Graylock," Dr. Egavine resumed, "you will cooperate with me fully and to the best of your ability now, knowing that I am both your master and friend. Are any of the other men who came here on those two

ships down by the water still alive?"

There was complete stillness for a second or two. Then Graylock's face began to work unpleasantly, all color draining from it. He said harshly, "No. But I . . . I don't . . ." He stammered incomprehensibly, went silent again, his expression wooden and set.

"Graylock," Egavine continued to probe, "you can remember everything now, and you are not afraid. Tell me what happened to the other men."

Sweat covered the castaway's ashen face. His mouth twisted in agonized, silent grimaces again. The bird thing leaped from his shoulder with a small purring sound, fluttered softly away.

Dr. Egavine repeated, "You are not afraid. You can remember. What happened to them? How did they die?"

And abruptly the big man's face smoothed out. He looked from Egavine to Dasinger and back with an air of brief puzzlement, then explained conversationally, "Why, Hovig's generator killed many of us as we ran away from the Antares. Some reached the edges of the circle with me, and I killed them later."

Dr. Egavine flicked another glance towards Dasinger but did not pause.

"And the crew of the second ship?" he asked.

"Those two. They had things I needed, and naturally I didn't want them alive here."

"Is Hovig's generator still on the Antares?"

"Yes."

"How does the generator kill?"

Sweat suddenly started out on Graylock's face again, but now he seemed unaware of any accompanying emotions. He said, "It kills by fear, of course. . . ."

THE story of the Dosey Asteroids raider and of Hovig's fear generators unfolded quickly from there. Hovig had developed his machines for the single purpose of robbing the Dosey Asteroids Shipping Station. The plan then had been to have the Antares cruise in uncharted space with the looted star hyacinths for at least two years, finally to approach the area of the Federation from a sector far removed from the Dosey system. That precaution resulted in disaster for Hovig. Chief Engineer Graylock had time to consider that his share in the profits of the raid would be relatively insignificant, and that there was a possibility of increasing it.

Graylock and his friends attacked their shipmates as the raider was touching down to the surface of an uncharted world to replenish its water supply. The attack succeeded but Hovig, fatally wounded, took a terrible

revenge on the mutineers. He contrived to set off one of his grisly devices, and to all intents and purposes everyone still alive on board the Antares immediately went insane with fear. The ship crashed out of control at the edge of a lake. Somebody had opened a lock and a number of the frantic crew plunged from the ramp and fell to their death on the rocks below. Those who reached the foot of the ramp fled frenziedly from the wreck, the effects of Hovig's machine pursuing them but weakening gradually as they widened the distance between themselves and the Antares. Finally, almost three miles away, the fear impulses faded out completely. . . .

But thereafter the wreck was unapproachable. The fear generator did not run out of power, might not run out of power for years. -

Dasinger said, "Doctor, let's hurry this up! Ask him why they weren't affected by their murder machines when they robbed Dosey Asteroids. Do the generators have a beam-operated shut-off, or what?"

Graylock listened to the question, said, "We had taken kwil. The effects were still very unpleasant, but they could be tolerated."

There was a pause of a few seconds. Dr. Egavine cleared his throat. "It appears, Dasinger,"

he remarked, "that we have failed to consider a very important clue!"

Dasinger nodded. "And an obvious one," he said drily. "Keep it moving along, doctor. How much kwil did they take? How long had they been taking it before the raid?"

Dr. Egavine glanced over at him, repeated the questions.

Graylock said Hovig had begun conditioning the crew to kwil a week or two before the Antares slipped out of Aruaque for the strike on the station. In each case the dosage had been built up gradually to the quantity the man in question required to remain immune to the generators. Individual variations had been wide and unpredictable.

Dasinger passed his tongue over his lips, nodded. "Ask him . . ."

HE checked himself at a soft, purring noise, a shadowy fluttering in the air. Graylock's animal flew past him, settled on its master's shoulder, turned to stare at Dasinger and Egavine. Dasinger looked at the yellow owl-eyes, the odd little tube of a mouth, continued to Egavine, "Ask him where the haul was stored in the ship."

Graylock confirmed Leed Farous' statement of what he had seen in the Antares's records. All but a few of the star hya-

cinths had been placed in a vault-like compartment in the storage, and the compartment was sealed. Explosives would be required to open it. Hovig kept out half a dozen of the larger stones, perhaps as an antidote to boredom during the long voyage ahead. Graylock had found one of them just before Hovig's infernal instrument went into action.

"And where is that one now?"

Dr. Egavine asked.

"I still have it."

"On your person?"

"Yes."

Dr. Egavine held out his hand, palm upward. "You no longer want it, Graylock. Give it to me."

Graylock looked bewildered; for a moment he appeared about to weep. Then he brought a knotted piece of leather from his pocket, unwrapped it, took out the gem and placed it in Egavine's hand. Egavine picked it up between thumb and forefinger of his other hand, held it out before him.

There was silence for some seconds while the star hyacinth burned in the evening air and the three men and the small winged animal stared at it. Then Dr. Egavine exhaled slowly.

"Ah, now!" he said, his voice a trifle unsteady. "Men might kill and kill for that one beauty alone, that is true! . . . Will you keep it for now, Dasinger? Or shall I?"

Dasinger looked at him thoughtfully.

"You keep it, doctor," he said.

DASINGER," Dr. Egavine observed a few minutes later, "I have been thinking. . . ."

"Yes?"

"Graylock's attempted description of his experience indicates that the machine on the Antares does not actually broadcast the emotion of terror, as he believes. The picture presented is that of a mind in which both the natural and the acquired barriers of compartmentalization are temporarily nullified, resulting in an explosion of compounded insanity to an extent which would be inconceivable without such an outside agent. As we saw in Graylock, the condition is in fact impossible to describe or imagine! A diabolical device. . . ."

He frowned. "Why the drug kwil counteracts such an effect remains unclear. But since we now know that it does, I may have a solution to the problem confronting us."

Dasinger nodded. "Let's hear it."

"Have Miss Mines bring the ship down immediately," Egavine instructed him. "There is a definite probability that among my medical supplies will be an effective substitute for kwil, for this particular purpose. A few

hours of experimentation, and . . ."

"Doctor," Dasinger interrupted, "hold it right there! So far there's been no real harm in sparring around. But we're in a different situation now . . . we may be running out of time very quickly. Let's quit playing games."

Dr. Egavine glanced sharply across at him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that we both have kwil, of course. There's no reason to experiment. But the fact that we have it is no guarantee that we'll be able to get near that generator. Leed Farous' tissues were soaked with the drug. Graylock's outfit had weeks to determine how much each of them needed to be able to operate within range of the machines and stay sane. We're likely to have trouble enough without trying to jockey each other."

Dr. Egavine cleared his throat. "But I . . ."

Dasinger interrupted again. "Your reluctance to tell me everything you knew or had guessed is understandable. You had no more reason to trust me completely than I had to trust you. So before you say anything else I'd like you to look at these credentials. You're familiar with the Federation seal, I think".

Dr. Egavine took the proffered identification case, glanced at

Dasinger again, then opened the case.

"So," he said presently. "You're a detective working for the Dosey Asteroids Company. . . ." His voice was even. "That alters the situation, of course. Why didn't you tell me this?"

"That should be obvious," Dasinger said. "If you're an honest man, the fact can make no difference. The company remains legally bound to pay out the salvage fee for the star hyacinths. They have no objection to that. What they didn't like was the possibility of having the gems stolen for the second time. If that's what you had in mind, you wouldn't, of course, have led an agent of the company here. In other words, doctor, in cooperating with me you're running no risk of being cheated out of your half of the salvage rights."

Dasinger patted the gun in his coat pocket. "And of course," he added, "if I happened to be a bandit in spite of the credentials, I'd be eliminating you from the partnership right now instead of talking to you! The fact that I'm not doing it should be a sufficient guarantee that I don't intend to do it."

Dr. Egavine nodded. "I'm aware of the point."

"Then let's get on with the salvage," Dasinger said. "For your further information, there's an armed Fleet ship hunting for us

with piratical intentions, and the probability is that it will find us in a matter of hours. . . .”

HE described the situation briefly, concluded, “You’ve carried out your part of the contract by directing us here. You can, if you wish, minimize further personal risks by using the Fleet scout’s lifeboat to get yourself and Quist off the planet, providing kwil will get you to the scout. Set a normspace course for Orado then, and we’ll pick you up after we’ve finished the job.”

Dr. Egavine shook his head. “Thank you, but I’m staying. It’s in my interest to give you what assistance I can . . . and, as you’ve surmised, I do have a supply of kwil. What is your plan?”

“Getting Hovig’s generator shut off is the first step,” Dasinger said. “And since we don’t know what dosage of the drug is required for each of us, we’d be asking for trouble by approaching the Antares in the ship. Miss Mines happens to be a kwil sensitive, in any case. So it’s going to take hiking, and I’ll start down immediately now. Would Graylock and the Fleetmen obey hypnotic orders to the extent of helping out dependably in the salvage work?”

Egavine nodded. “There is no question of that.”

“Then you might start conditioning them to the idea now. From the outer appearance of the Antares, it may be a real job to cut through inside her to get to the star hyacinths. We have the three salvage suits. If I can make it to the generator, shut it off, and it turns out then that I need some hypnotized brawn down there, Miss Mines will fly over the shelter as a signal to start marching the men down.”

“Why march? At that point, Miss Mines could take us to the wreck within seconds.”

Dasinger shook his head. “Sorry, doctor. Nobody but Miss Mines or myself goes aboard the Mooncat until we either wind up the job or are forced to clear out and run. I’m afraid that’s one precaution I’ll have to take. When you get to the Antares we’ll give each of the boys a full shot of kwil. The ones that don’t go limp on it can start helping.”

Dr. Egavine said reflectively, “You feel the drug would still be a requirement?”

“Well,” Dasinger said, “Hovig appears to have been a man who took precautions, too. We know he had three generators and that he set off one of them. The question is where the other two are. It wouldn’t be so very surprising, would it, if one or both of them turned out to be waiting for intruders in the vault where he sealed away the loot?”

THE night was cool. Wind rustled in the ground vegetation and the occasional patches of trees. Otherwise the slopes were quiet. The sky was covered with cloud layers through which the Mooncat drifted invisibly. In the infrared glasses Dasinger had slipped on when he started, the rocky hillside showed clear for two hundred yards, tinted green as though bathed by a strange moonlight; beyond was murky darkness.

"Still all right?" Duomart's voice inquired from the wrist communicator.

"Uh-huh!" Dasinger said. "A little nervous, but I'd be feeling that way in any case, under the circumstances."

"I'm not so sure," she said. "You've gone past the two and a half mile line from the generator. From what that Graylock monster said, you should have started to pick up its effects. Why not take your shot, and play safe?"

"No," Dasinger said. "If I wait until I feel something that can be definitely attributed to the machine, I can keep the kwil dose down to what I need. I don't want to load myself up with the drug any more than I have to."

A stand of tall trees with furry trunks moved presently into range of the glasses, thick undergrowth beneath. Dasinger picked his way through the thickets with some caution. The indi-

cations so far had been that local animals had as much good reason to avoid the vicinity of Hovig's machine as human beings, but if there was any poisonous vermin in the area this would be a good place for it to be lurking. Which seemed a fairly reasonable apprehension. Other, equally definite, apprehensions looked less reasonable when considered objectively. If he stumbled on a stone, it produced a surge of sharp alarm which lingered for seconds; and his breathing had quickened much more than could be accounted for by the exertions of the downhill climb.

FIVE minutes beyond the wood Dasinger emerged from the mouth of a narrow gorge, and stopped short with a startled exclamation. His hand dug hurriedly into his pocket for the case of kwil needles.

"What's the matter?" Duomart inquired sharply.

Dasinger produced a somewhat breathless laugh. "I've decided to take the kwil. At once!"

"You're feeling . . . things?" Her voice was also shaky.

"I'll say! Not just a matter of feeling it, either. For example, a couple of old friends are walking towards me at the moment. Dead ones, as it happens."

"Ugh!" she said faintly. "Hurry up!"

Dasinger shoved the needle's

plunger a quarter of the way down on the kwil solution, pulled the needle out of his arm. He stood still for some seconds, filled his lungs with the cool night air, let it out in a long sigh.

"That did it!" he announced, his voice steadying again. "The stuff works fast. A quarter shot. . . ."

"Why did you wait so long?"

"It wasn't too bad till just now. Then suddenly . . . that generator can't be putting out evenly! Anyway, it hit me like a rock. I doubt you'd be interested in details."

"I wouldn't," Duomart agreed. "I'm crawly enough as it is up here. I wish we were through with this!"

"With just a little luck we should be off the planet in an hour."

By the time he could hear the lapping of the lake water on the wind, he was aware of the growing pulse of Hovig's generator ahead of him, alive and malignant in the night. Then the Fleet scout came into the glasses, a squat, dark ship, its base concealed in the growth that had sprung up around it after it piled up on the slope. Dasinger moved past the scout, pushing through bushy aromatic shrubbery which thickened as he neared the water. He felt physically sick and sluggish now, was aware, too, of an increasing reluctance to go on.

He would need more of the drug before attempting to enter the Antares.

To the west, the sky was partly clear, and presently he saw the wreck of the Dosey Asteroid raider loom up over the edge of the lake arm, blotting out a section of stars. Still beyond the field of the glasses, it looked like an armored water animal about to crawl up on the slopes. Dasinger approached slowly, in foggy unwillingness, emerged from the bushes into open ground, and saw a broad rump furred with a thick coat of moldlike growth rise steeply towards an open lock in the upper part of the Antares. The pulse of the generator might have been the beating of the maimed ship's heart, angry and threatening. It seemed to be growing stronger. And had something moved in the lock? Dasinger stood, senses swimming sickly, dreaming that something huge rose slowly, towered over him like a giant wave, leaned forwards. . . .

STILL all right?" Duomart inquired.

The wave broke.

"*Dasinger! What's happened?*"

"Nothing," Dasinger said, his voice raw. He pulled the empty needle out of his arm, dropped it. "But something nearly did! The kwil I took wasn't enough. I was standing here waiting to

let that damned machine swamp me when you spoke."

"You should have heard what you sounded like over the communicator! I thought you were . . ." her voice stopped for an instant, began again. "Anyway," she said briskly, "you're loaded with kwil now, I hope?"

"More than I should be, probably." Dasinger rubbed both hands slowly down along his face. "Well, it couldn't be helped. That was pretty close, I guess! I don't even remember getting the hypo out of the case."

He looked back up at the looming bow of the Antares, unbeautiful enough but prosaically devoid of menace and mystery now, though the pulsing beat still came from there. A mechanical obstacle and nothing else. "I'm going on in now."

From the darkness within the lock came the smell of stagnant water, of old decay. The mold that proliferated over the ramp did not extend into the wreck. But other things grew inside, pale and oily tendrils festooning the walls. Dasinger removed his night glasses, brought out a pencil light, let the beam fan out, and moved through the lock.

The crash which had crumpled the ship's lower shell had thrust up the flooring of the lock compartment, turned it into what was nearly level footing now. On the right, a twenty-foot black

gap showed between the ragged edge of the deck and the far bulkhead from which it had been torn. The oily plant life spread over the edges of the flooring and on down into the flooded lower sections of the Antares. The pulse of Hovig's generator came from above and the left where a passage slanted steeply up into the ship's nose. Dasinger turned towards the passage, began clambering up.

THERE was no guesswork involved in determining which of the doors along the passage hid the machine in what, if Graylock's story was correct, had been Hovig's personal stateroom. As Dasinger approached that point, it was like climbing into silent thunder. The door was locked, and though the walls beside it were warped and cracked, the cracks were too narrow to permit entry. Dasinger dug out a tool which had once been the prized property of one of Orado's more eminent safecrackers, and went to work on the lock. A minute or two later he forced the door partly back in its tilted frame, scrambled through into the cabin.

Not enough was left of Hovig after this span of time to be particularly offensive. The generator lay in a lower corner, half buried under other molded and unrecognizable debris. Dasinger uncov-

ered it, feeling as if he were drowning in the invisible torrent pouring out from it, knelt down and placed the light against the wall beside him.

The machine matched Graylock's description. A pancake-shaped heavy plastic casing eighteen inches across, two thick studs set into its edge, one stud depressed and flush with the surface, the other extended. Dasinger thumbed experimentally at the extended stud, found it apparently immovable, took out his gun.

"How is it going, Dasinger?" Miss Mines asked.

"All right," Dasinger said. He realized he was speaking with difficulty. "I've found the thing! Trying to get it shut off now. Tell you in a minute. . . ."

He tapped the extended stud twice with the butt of the gun, then slashed heavily down. The stud flattened back into the machine. Its counterpart didn't move. The drowning sensations continued.

Dasinger licked his lips, dropped the gun into his pocket, brought out the lock opener. He had the generator's cover plate pried partway back when it shattered. With that, the thunder that wasn't sound ebbed swiftly from the cabin. Dasinger reached into the generator, wrenched out a power battery, snapping half a dozen leads.

He sat back on his heels, momentarily dizzy with relief, then climbed to his feet with the smashed components of Hovig's machine, and turned to the door. Something in the debris along the wall flashed dazzlingly in the beam of his light.

Dasinger stared at the star hyacinth for an instant, then picked it up. It was slightly larger than the one Graylock had carried out of the Antares with him, perfectly cut. He found four others of similar quality within the next minute, started back down to the lock compartment with what might amount to two million credits in honest money, around half that in the Hub's underworld gem trade, in one of his pockets.

"Yes?"

"Got the thing's teeth pulled now."

"Thank God! Coming right down. . . ."

The Mooncat was sliding in from the south as Dasinger stepped out on the head of the ramp. "Lock's open," Duomart's voice informed him. "I'll come aft and help."

IT took four trips with the gravity crane to transfer the salvage equipment into the Antares's lock compartment. Then Miss Mines sealed the Mooncat and went back upstairs. Dasinger climbed into one of the three

salvage suits, hung the wrist communicator inside the helmet, snapped on the suit's lights and went over to the edge of the compartment deck. Black water reflected the lights thirty feet below. He checked the assortment of tools attached to his belt, nudged the suit's gravity cutoff to the right, energized magnetic pads on knees, boot tips and wrists, then fly-walked rapidly down a bulkhead and dropped into the water.

"No go, Duomart!" he informed the girl ten minutes later, his voice heavy with disappointment. "It's an ungodly twisted mess down here . . . worse than I thought it might be! Looks as if we'll have to cut all the way through to that vault. Give Egavine the signal to start herding the boys down."

Approximately an hour afterwards, Miss Mines reported urgently through the communicator, "They'll reach the lock in less than four minutes now, Dasinger! Better drop it and come up!"

"I'm on my way." Dasinger reluctantly switched off the beam-saw he was working with, fastened it to the belt of the salvage suit, turned in the murky water and started back towards the upper sections of the wreck. The job of getting through the tangled jungle of metal and plastic to the gem vault appeared no more than half completed, and

the prospect of being delayed over it until the Spy discovered them here began to look like a disagreeably definite possibility. He clambered and floated hurriedly up through the almost vertical passage he'd cleared, found daylight flooding the lock compartment, the system's yellow sun well above the horizon. Peeling off the salvage suit, he restored the communicator to his wrist and went over to the head of the ramp.

THE five men came filing down the last slopes in the morning light, Taunus and Calat in the lead, Graylock behind them, the winged animal riding his shoulder and lifting occasionally into the air to flutter about the group. Quist and Egavine brought up the rear. Dasinger took the gun from his pocket.

"I'll clip my gun to the suit belt when I go back down in the water with the boys," he told the communicator. "If the doctor's turning any tricks over in his mind, that should give him food for thought. I'll relieve Quist of his weapon as he comes in."

"What about the guns in Graylock's hut?" Duomart asked.

"No charge left in them. If I'm reasonably careful, I really don't see what Dr. Egavine can do. He knows he loses his half-interest in the salvage the moment he pulls any illegal stunts."

A minute or two later, he called out, "Hold it there, doctor?"

The group shuffled to a stop near the foot of the ramp, staring up at him.

"Yes, Dasinger?" Dr. Egavine called back, sounding a trifle winded.

"Have Quist come up first and alone, please." Dasinger disarmed the little man at the entrance to the lock, motioned him on to the center of the compartment. The others arrived then in a line, filed past Dasinger and joined Quist.

"You've explained the situation to everybody?" Dasinger asked Egavine. There was an air of tenseness about the little group he didn't like, though tension might be understandable enough under the circumstances.

"Yes," Dr. Egavine said. "They feel entirely willing to assist us, of course." He smiled significantly.

"Fine." Dasinger nodded. "Line them up and let's get going! Taunus first. Get . . ."

There was a momentary stirring of the air back of his head. He turned sharply, jerking up the gun, felt twin needles drive into either side of his neck.

His body instantly went insensate. The lock appeared to circle about him, then he was on his back and Graylock's pet was alighting with a flutter of wings

on his chest. It craned its head forward to peer into his face, the tip of its mouth tube open, showing a ring of tiny teeth. Vision and awareness left Dasinger together.

The other men hadn't moved. Now Dr. Egavine, his face a little pale, came over to Dasinger, the birdlike creature bounding back to the edge of the lock as he approached. Egavine knelt down, said quietly, his mouth near the wrist communicator, "Duomart Mines, you will obey me."

There was silence for a second or two. Then the communicator whispered, "Yes."

Dr. Egavine drew in a long, slow breath.

"You feel no question, no concern, no doubt about this situation," he went on. "You will bring the ship down now and land it safely beside the Antares. Then come up into the lock of the Antares for further instructions." Egavine stood up, his eyes bright with triumph.

IN the Mooncat three miles overhead, Duomart switched off her wrist communicator, sat white-faced, staring at the image of the Antares in the ground-view plate.

"Sweet Jana!" she whispered. "How did he . . . now what do I . . ."

She hesitated an instant, then

opened a console drawer, took out the kwil needle Dasinger had left with her and slipped it into a pocket, clipped the holstered shocker back to her belt, and reached for the controls. A vast whistling shriek smote the Antares and the ears of those within as the Mooncat ripped down through atmosphere at an unatmospheric speed, leveled out smoothly and floated to the ground beside the wreck.

There was no one in sight in the lock of the Antares as Duomart came out and sealed the Mooncat's entry behind her. She went quickly up the broad, mold-covered ramp. The lock remained empty. From beyond it came the sound of some metallic object being pulled about, a murmur of voices. Twelve steps from the top, she took out the little gun, ran up to the lock and into it, bringing the gun up. She had a glimpse of Dr. Egavine and Quist standing near a rusty bench in the compartment, of Graylock half into a salvage suit, Dasinger on the floor . . . then a flick of motion to right and left.

The tips of two space lines lashed about her simultaneously, one pinning her arms to her sides, the other clamping about her ankles and twitching her legs out from beneath her. She fired twice blindly to the left as the lines snapped her face down to the floor of the compartment.

The gun was clamped beneath her stretched-out body and useless.

WHAT made that animal attack me anyway?" Dasinger asked wearily. He had just regained consciousness, and been ordered by Calat to join the others on a rusted metal bench in the center of the lock compartment; Duomart to his left, Egavine on his right, Quist on the other side of Egavine. Calat stood watching them fifteen feet away, holding Dasinger's gun in one hand while he jiggled a few of Hovig's star hyacinths gently about in the other.

Calat's expression was cheerful, which made him the exception here. Liu Taunus and Graylock were down in the hold of the ship, working sturdily with cutter beams and power hoists to get to the sealed vault and blow it open. How long they'd been at it, Dasinger didn't know.

"You can thank your double-crossing partner for what happened!" Duomart informed him. She looked pretty thoroughly mussed up though still unsubdued. "Graylock's been using the bird-thing to hunt with," she said. "It's a bloodsucker . . . nicks some animal with its claws and the animal stays knocked out while the little beast fills its tummy. So the intellectual over there had Graylock point you out to his

pet, and it waited until your back was turned. . . ." She hesitated, went on less vehemently, "Sorry about not carrying out orders, Dasinger. I assumed Egavine really was in control here, and I could have handled *him*. I walked into a trap." She fished the shards of a smashed kwil needle out of her pocket, looked at them, and dropped them on the floor before her. "I got slammed around a little," she explained.

Calat laughed, said something in the Fleet tongue, grinning at her. She ignored him.

Egavine said, "My effects were secretly inspected while we were at the Fleet station, Dasinger, and the Fleetmen have been taking drugs to immunize themselves against my hypnotic agents. They disclosed this when Miss Mines brought the speedboat down. There was nothing I could do. I regret to say that they intend to murder us. They are waiting only to assure themselves that the star hyacinths actually are in the indicated compartment."

"Great!" Dasinger groaned. He put his hands back in a groping gesture to support himself on the bench.

"Still pretty feeble, I suppose?" Miss Mines inquired, gentle sympathy in her voice.

"I'm poisoned," he muttered brokenly. "The thing's left me paralyzed. . . ." He sagged side-

ways a little, his hand moving behind Duomart. He pinched her then in a markedly unparalyzed and vigorous manner.

Duomart's right eyelid flickered for an instant.

SOMEBODY wrung the little monster's neck before I got here," she remarked. "But there're other necks I'd sooner wring! Your partner's, for instance. Not that he's necessarily the biggest louse around at the moment." She nodded at Calat. "The two runches who call themselves Fleetmen don't intend to share the star hyacinths even with their own gang! They're rushing the job through so they can be on their way to the Hub before the Spy arrives. And don't think Liu Taunus trusts that muscle-bound foogal standing there, either! He's hanging on to the key of the Mooncat's console until he comes back up."

Calat smiled with a suggestion of strain, then said something in a flat, expressionless voice, staring at her.

"Oh, sure," she returned. "With Taunus holding me, I suppose?" She looked at Dasinger. "They're not shooting *me* right off, you know," she told him. "They're annoyed with me, so they're taking me along for something a little more special. But they'll have to skip the fun if the Spy shows up, or I'll be

telling twenty armed Fleetmen exactly what kind of thieving cheats they have leading them!" She looked back at Calat, smiled, placed the tip of her tongue lightly between her lips for an instant, then pronounced a few dozen Fleet words in a clear, precise voice.

It must have been an extraordinarily unflattering comment. Calat went white, then red. Half-smart tough had been Duomart's earlier description of him. It began to look like an accurate one . . . Dasinger felt a surge of pleased anticipation. His legs already were drawn well back beneath the bench; he shifted his weight slowly forwards now, keeping an expression of anxious concern on his face. Calat spoke in Fleetlingue again, voice thickening with rage.

Miss Mines replied sweetly, stood up. The challenge direct.

The Fleetman's face worked in incredulous fury. He shifted the gun to his left hand and came striding purposefully towards Miss Mines, right fist cocked. Then, as Dasinger tensed his legs happily, a muffled thump from deep within the wreck announced the opening of the star hyacinth vault.

The sound was followed by instant proof that Hovig had trapped the vault.

Duomart and Calat screamed together. Dasinger drove himself

forward off the bench, aiming for the Fleetman's legs, checked and turned for the gun which Calat, staggering and shrieking, his face distorted with lunatic terror, had flung aside. Dr. Egavine, alert for this contingency, already was stooping for the gun, hand outstretched, when Dasinger lunged against him, bowling him over.

DASINGER came up with the gun, Quist pounding at his shoulders, flung the little man aside, turned back in a frenzy of urgency. Duomart twisted about on the floor near the far end of the compartment, arms covering her face. The noises that bubbled out from behind her arms set Dasinger's teeth on edge. She rolled over convulsively twice, stopped dangerously close to the edge of the jagged break in the deck, was turning again as Dasinger dropped beside her and caught her.

Immediately there was a heavy, painful blow on his shoulder. He glanced up, saw Quist running toward him, a rusted chunk of metal like the one he had thrown in his raised hand, and Egavine peering at both of them from the other side of the compartment. Dasinger flung a leg across Duomart, pinning her down, pulled out the gun, fired without aiming. Quist reversed his direction almost in mid-stride. Dasinger

fired again, saw Egavine dart towards the lock, hesitate there an instant, then disappear down the ramp, Quist sprinting out frantically after him.

A moment later he drove one of the remaining kwil needles through the cloth of Duomart's uniform, and rammed the plunger down.

The drug hit hard and promptly. Between one instant and the next, the plunging and screaming ended; she drew in a long, shuddering breath, went limp, her eyes closing slowly. Dasinger was lifting her from the floor when the complete silence in the compartment caught his attention. He looked around. Calat was not in sight. And only then did he become aware of a familiar sensation . . . a Hovig generator's pulsing, savage storm of seeming nothingness, nullified by the drug in his blood.

He laid the unconscious girl on the bench, went on to the lock.

Dr. Egavine and Quist had vanished; the thick shrubbery along the lake bank stirred uneasily at twenty different points but he wasn't looking for the pair. With the Mooncat inaccessible to them, there was only one place they could go. Calat's body lay doubled up in the rocks below the ramp, almost sixty feet down, where other human bodies had lain six years earlier. Da-

singer glanced over at the Fleet scout, went back into the compartment.

He was buckling himself into the third salvage suit when he heard the scout's lifeboat take off. At a guess Hovig's little private collection of star hyacinths was taking off with it. Dasinger decided he couldn't care less.

He snapped on the headpiece, then hesitated at the edge of the deck, looking down. A bubble of foggy white light was rising slowly through the water of the hold, and in a moment the headpiece of one of the other suits broke the oily surface, stayed there, bobbing gently about. Dasinger climbed down, brought Liu Taunus' body back up to the lock compartment, and recovered the Mooncat's master key.

He found Graylock floating in his suit against a bulkhead not far from the shattered vault where Hovig's two remaining generators thundered. Dasinger silenced the machines, fastened them and a small steel case containing nearly a hundred million credits' worth of star hyacinths to the salvage carrier, and towed it all up to the lock compartment.

A very few minutes later, the Mooncat lifted in somewhat jerky, erratic fashion from the planet's surface. As Dasinger had suspected, he lacked, and by a good deal, Miss Mines' trained sensitivity with the speedboat's

controls; but he succeeded in wrestling the little ship up to a five-mile altitude where a sub-space dive might be carried out in relative safety.

He was attempting then to get the Mooncat's nose turned away from the distant volcano ranges towards which she seemed determined to point when the detector needles slapped flat against their pins and the alarm bell sounded. A strange ship stood outlined in the Mooncat's stern screen.

THE image vanished as Dasinger hit the dive button, simultaneously flattening the speed controls with a slam of his hand. The semisolid subspace turbulence representing the mountain ranges beyond the lake flashed instantly past below him . . . within yards, it seemed. Another second put them beyond the planet's atmosphere. Then the Spy reappeared in subspace, following hard. A hammering series of explosions showed suddenly in the screens, kept up for a few hair-raising moments, began to drop back. Five minutes later, with the distance between them widening rapidly, the Spy gave up the chase, swung around and headed back towards the planet.

Dasinger shakily reduced his ship's speed to relatively sane level, kept her moving along another twenty minutes, then surfaced into normspace and set a

general course for the Hub. He was a very fair yachtsman for a planeteer. But after riding the Mooncat for the short time he'd turned her loose to keep ahead of the Spy through the G2's stress zone, he didn't have to be told that in Fleet territory he was outclassed. He mopped his forehead, climbed gratefully out of the pilot seat and went to the cot he had hauled into the control room, to check on Duomart Mines.

She was still unconscious, of course; the dose he'd given her was enough to knock a kwil-sensitive out for at least a dozen hours. Dasinger looked down at the filth-smudged, pale face, the bruised cheeks and blackened left eye for a few seconds, then opened Dr. Egavine's medical kit to do what he could about getting Miss Mines patched up again.

Fifteen hours later she was still asleep, though to all outer appearances back in good repair. Dasinger happened to be bemusedly studying her face once more when she opened her eyes and gazed up at him.

"We made it! You . . ." She smiled, tried to sit up, looked startled, then indignant. "What's the idea of tying me down to this thing?"

Dasinger nodded. "I guess you're all there!" He reached down to unfasten her from the cot. "After what happened, I

wasn't so sure you'd be entirely rational when the kwil wore off and you woke up."

Duomart paled a little. "I hadn't imagined . . ." She shook her blond head. "Well, let's skip that! I'll have nightmares for years. . . . What happened to the others?"

DASINGER told her, concluded, "Egavine may have run into the Spy, but I doubt it. He'll probably show up in the Hub eventually with the gems he took from Calat, and if he doesn't get caught peddling them he may wind up with around a million credits . . . about the sixth part of what he would have collected if he'd stopped playing crooked and trying to get everything. I doubt the doctor will ever quit kicking himself for that!"

"Your agency gets the whole salvage fee now, eh?"

"Not exactly," Dasinger said. "Considering everything that's happened, the Kyth Interstellar Detective Agency would have to be extremely ungrateful if it didn't feel you'd earned the same split we were going to give Dr. Egavine."

Miss Mines gazed at him in startled silence, flushed excitedly. "Think you can talk the Kyth people into *that*, Dasinger?"

"I imagine so," Dasinger said, "since I own the agency. That

should finance your Willata Fleet operation very comfortably and still leave a couple of million credits over for your old age. I doubt we'll clear anything on Hovig's generators. . . ."

Miss Mines looked uncomfortable. "Do you have those things aboard?"

"At the moment. Disassembled of course. Primarily I didn't want the Fleet gang to get their hands on them. We might lose them in space somewhere or take them back to the Federation for the scientists to poke over. We'll discuss that on the way. Now, do you feel perky enough to want a look at the stuff that's cost around a hundred and fifty lives before it ever hit the Hub's markets?"

"Couldn't feel perkier!" She straightened up expectantly. "Let's see them. . . ."

Dasinger turned away towards the wall where he had put down the little steel case with the loot of the Dosey Asteroids robbery.

Behind him, Duomart screamed.

He spun back to her, his face white. "What's the matter?"

Duomart was staring wide-eyed past him towards the instrument console, the back of one hand to her mouth. "That . . . the thing!"

"Thing?"

"Big . . . yellow . . . wet . . . ugh! It's ducked behind the con-

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sole, Dasinger! It's lurking there!"

"Oh!" Dasinger said, relaxing. He smiled. "That's all right. Don't worry about it."

"Don't worry about . . . are you crazy?"

"Not in the least. I thought you were for a second, but it's very simple. You've worked off the kwil and now you're in the hangover period. You get hallucinations then, just as I usually do. For the next eight or nine hours, you'll be seeing odd things around from time to time. So what? They're not real."

ALL RIGHT, they're not real, A but they seem real enough while they're around," Duomart said. "I don't want to see them." She caught her breath and her hand flew up to her mouth again. "Dasinger, please, don't you have something that will put me back to sleep till I'm past the hangover too?"

Dasinger reflected. "One of Doc Egavine's hypno sprays will do it. I know enough of the mumbo jumbo to send you to dreamland for another ten hours." He smiled evilly. "Of course, you realize that means you're putting yourself completely in my power."

Duomart's eyes narrowed for an instant. She considered him, grinned. "I'll risk it," she said.

THE END

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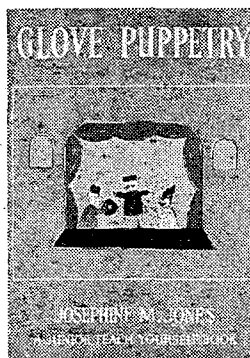
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When a country is as champion-conscious as America, it's surprising that no one has yet developed the ultimate contest. Dr. McClatchie, whose recent novel, "The Last Vial," established him as a top-ranking sf writer, now tells us the engaging story of the geneticists' search for

Mother America

By SAM McCLATCHIE, M.D.

Illustrated by ADKINS

THE TALL young man faded back quickly, poised for an instant and then threw a long high pass. The crowd came up roaring. Twenty yards from the goal line a smaller, sturdier player swerved quickly around the end and took the pass in his stride. With a beautiful curving run he tricked the fullback, crossed the line and then, showing no sign of effort, trotted back up the field and threw the ball to the umpire.

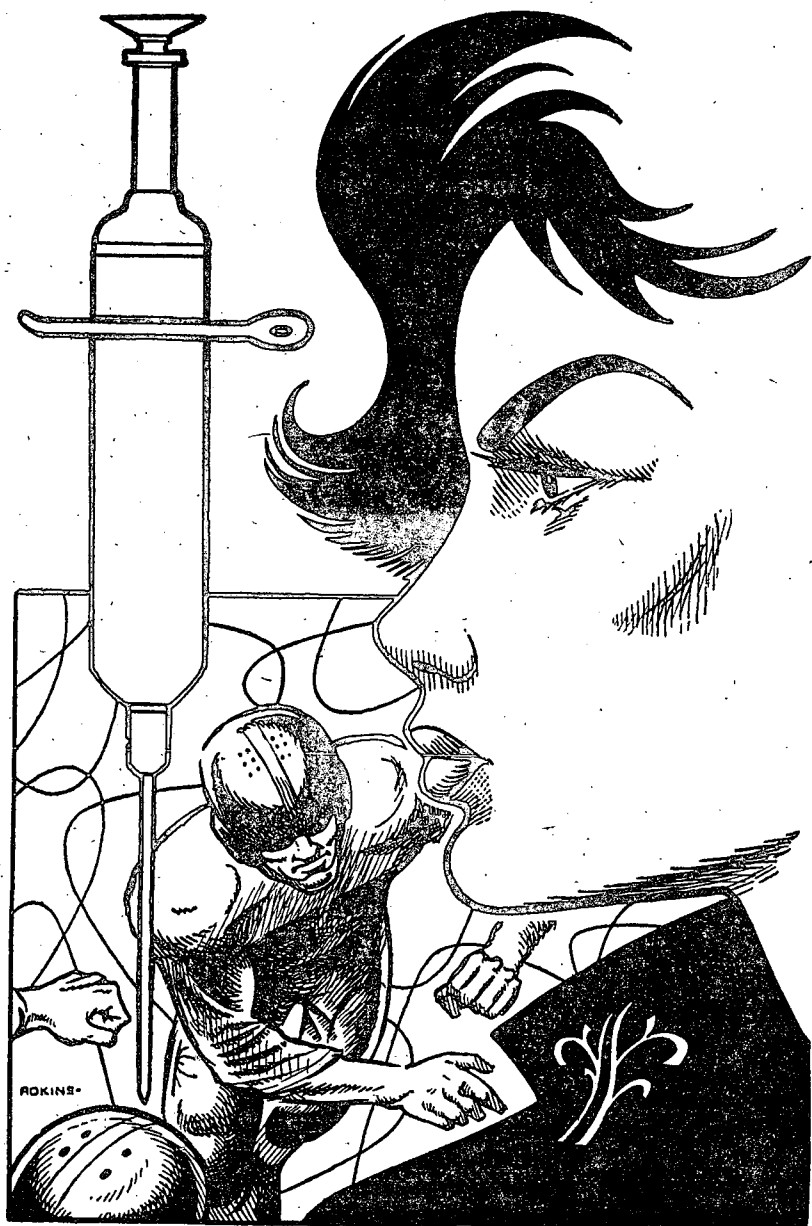
"Wonderful! What a magnificent runner that lad is! You're lucky to have him, George." The speaker, a trimly built, athletic man in his middle forties turned to his companion, talking loudly

above the buzz of the crowd. George Turner nodded agreement. "We are. Every other University in the States was after him. He's the first Boy America you know. We've been watching him for years."

"The first Boy America?" John Harmon echoed in surprise. "I didn't know that. You did say Boy America . . . not All American?"

"He's both; All American in football and a Boy America too."

The gun signalled the end of the game and the two men rose from their box seats to go out. Directly below them the players trotted quickly towards the



dressing rooms. Harmon leaned over to watch.

"There he is now. A fine looking boy too!" He studied the young man's face intently. "Y'know he reminds me of somebody . . . somebody I know well, but I can't put my finger on it."

"I'm not surprised. He's Gloria Manson's boy."

Harmon frowned. "No, that's not it, George. Of course there's the resemblance to his mother . . . and who could forget the glorious Gloria even after twenty years. But it was the way he moved, and that smile." He shook his head. "It'll come to me yet."

They took the belt walk to the parking area and stepped off it at George's car. Moving quietly on its aircushion, the car joined the line-up out on the main road where George locked the controls on to Route 63. The speed rose to eighty and steadied as the car settled into its place in the traffic pattern. Relaxed in their seats the two men lit their anticancers and puffed contentedly as they watched the scenery. It would be another hour before George would need to touch the controls as they neared home.

"So he looks like someone you know?" George asked. "I'd like to know who it is just out of curiosity. As you are aware, no one but the Genetic Panel knows whose sperm is used to impregnate the Mother America."

"I haven't got it yet, George, but I will. Were you the geneticist for this boy?"

"Yes, I was. I told you he was Gloria Manson's. Don't you remember when you met her?"

"Soaring satellites!" Harmon exclaimed. "How could I forget? You introduced me to her."

"Twenty years ago," Turner mused. "What a crazy week that was. I guess you were glad to get back to the Space Force."

"In a way," Harmon agreed. "I've often wondered where you were since then. I never dreamed you'd be Dean of the Genetics Faculty when I came to the Space Engineering School."

"I hope you'll like it here," George said. "They couldn't have picked a better Director."

THE senator from Alaska had the floor. He had had it for several hours now and the chamber was almost empty as he droned on.

"And so, gentlemen, I feel that the greatest state in the union, the only state that can afford to increase its population because there is still some unoccupied space, the only state where anti-conception vaccination is not compulsory until after four children instead of two, the state where ordinary people will have room to get out and exercise instead of being spectators, this state of Alaska, I say, is the only

state that should be considered when we select a fine, virile American male as the father of America's Child of the Year. I would dare to go farther and say we should also provide the female, Mother America of 1995, except that our President, my fellow Alaskan, has generously decided that no one state can have both mother and father. Alaska is a man's country. It should provide the man . . ."

Wearily George Turner got up and turned off the colorvision. The political pressures were increasing rapidly; that was obvious. What had started as a national search for the most suitable future parents in America would soon be a free-for-all. He would have to give the committee his choice, and quickly! Back to his work he went; calculating possibilities, eliminating entrants one by one. The National Genetics Laboratory had been given the task of screening the finalists from each state and Turner, much against his will, had been selected by the Director to do the work.

"George," he'd said one fateful morning, "I have a job for you."

"What's that, sir?"

"You've seen the report of this new contest being run by Dee Lish Baby Foods, haven't you?"

"Can't say I have, sir. I've been working on that new sex gene.

Haven't had time to read the papers."

"Oh? Well it all started on their colorvision program, the one where they select the All American babies. You've seen it haven't you?"

Turner shook his head. "Sputtering sputniks! I know you're all wrapped up in your work but it doesn't have to be a shroud. You'd better get out into the world a little." The Director laid a friendly arm on George's shoulder. "This job will be just the thing."

"What job?"

"Why, the contest! Dee Lish separate the babies into three groups. There's the natural All American baby selected from families in the two-baby group; then there's a prize for best baby in the unlimited family section. Naturally, since those parents are in the genetically superior group, it wouldn't be fair to pit them against the two-baby families. Then there's a class for babies of artificially impregnated mothers, both married and single. It's a very popular program. The prizes are wonderful and the winners in the limited family class are allowed to have more children than their quota, all expenses paid of course."

"I can see why it's popular all right," Georga said, "but where do I come in?"

THREE months ago the Delish scenario writers had a brainstorm. They reasoned that if they began a new contest to pick the most suitable mother in America and then had her impregnated, artificially of course, by the most suitable donor, they would stir up all sorts of excitement for the next nine months and produce a baby that should be a worldbeater. The mother would be given a tremendous annuity, for life, and the babe assured of all expenses right through college."

"It all sounds faintly nauseating to me."

"George, you're impossible. A geneticist who still believes in fortuitous breeding!"

"I'm not so darn sure we can pick 'em better any other way. We certainly haven't got all the answers."

"I agree, George, I agree," the Director's smile was still friendly, if a little strained. "This is a National Laboratory, however, and the President rang me up the other day and asked that we do the final screening."

"The President? But this is a commercial gag!"

"Not any longer, my boy. You see the Russians recently came out with a wonder drug, a sort of gene stimulator, that they claim produces highly intelligent and well-proportioned children. The Chinese now claim that, by using

a controlled environment in their communes, they are producing a super race. We had to do something! Our side is going to claim that the union of a red blooded American male and a modern capitalist female will produce offspring far superior to anything else in the world, thus demonstrating the supremacy of the American way of life."

"Dear God! Why pick me?"

"You're junior to all the others, for one thing. And besides, you'll still be around to see Boy America grow up."

"Boy America?"

"Each year there will be a new contest; a boy the first year, a girl the second and so on. You'll have to appear on colorvision of course. It will be a nice change for you, and good for the Laboratory too! New York is a grand town for a vacation."

NEW YORK is a grand town for a vacation," George thought bitterly, as he parried the reporters' persistent questions in the lobby of Coloraudio System a week later.

"Say Doc, what about this super-female from Texas," one needler shouted above the babble.

"So what about her?" George said gruffly.

"Senator Bragg says she should be the one selected for Mother America."

"Look, friend, Senator Bragg

is a Texan and a politician. Naturally he wants his state to have the honor. I'll pick the one I think best qualified!"

"Yeah, Doc, we know. But what is this super-female gag anyway."

"Some women have more female sex genes than others. She happens to have the most ever reported to the Genetic Registry. Has the Senator seen her?"

"He didn't say."

"He should take a look sometime. She's five feet five, one hundred and sixty pounds and looks like a Texas longhorn, without the horns." He brushed past the reporter. "You got any more bright ideas?"

A New York reporter pulled on his coat sleeve. Annoyed by their persistence Turner shrugged free.

"Doctor Turner," the man said. "What do you think of this idea of using the Man from Mars as the male donor?"

"You mean Captain Jack Harmon of the Space Force?"

"Yes. He's in town for the big parade right now."

"Look, we can't tell you who the donor will be. It's against the law, remember?" Turner quoted the rule, "Under Section 48b, single females may bear children if they wish, when authorized by law, but are not allowed to pick the donor. He must remain anonymous. The local

Genetics Panel does the choosing. Besides, Harmon has been in space for months. Who knows what changes there may be in his sex glands."

They reached the conference room and entered. The Dee Lish representative looked at his watch and raised his hands.

"Gentlemen, no more questions please. We have a program on the air tonight and Doctor Turner has to be prepared." When the room cleared he turned to George. "Doctor, will you be ready to name the winner on tonight's program?"

Turner shook his head. "You know I've interviewed all the finalists but one, Miss Gloria Manson. Until I see her I can't decide. I haven't talked to her at all but her press agent promised he would have her here this afternoon."

"That's Gloria Manson the actress-dramatist?"

"Yes, the one who wrote *The Canals of Mars* and takes the female lead."

"Roaring rockets! If she wins what a blastoff that will be."

"I don't understand."

"We have arranged with the Mayor of New York that the winner will ride with Captain Jack Harmon tomorrow in the big parade celebrating his return from Mars. And Miss Manson is the star in a hilarious hit about space. What could be better?"

"To stop the whole damn foolishness altogether," said George gloomily and ignored the hurt look on the press agent's face.

THEY were getting up to leave when the door burst open and slammed against the wall. A tall, beautifully dressed and shaped brunette brushed aside a little man who was trying to talk to her and strode into the room. Her green eyes narrowed like a cat's after a bird.

"Which of you is the geneticist?" she demanded, and then to George, "You . . . you must be . . . you aren't dressed like a business man. Your suit is five years out of style."

Abashed, George looked at himself. "What's wrong with it?"

"You'd never understand and I haven't time to tell you. What I want to know is, who gave you the right to use my name in this silly Mother America contest. And you," she turned on the Dee Lish agent, "quit gawping at me. I'm not going to blast off. Who are you anyway."

"Miss Manson, please!" The little man was in front of her again. "If the reporters hear about this . . ."

"Oh shut up Harry! All right, Doctor, what's your excuse?"

George rallied and attacked. "I haven't any, Miss Manson. I didn't ask for your name. It was

submitted to me as a possibility from the Dee Lish Company. You needn't worry, however. You are displaying adequate reasons for me to disqualify your entry right now."

"Oh, an advertising stunt, is it? Harry, this is your idea . . . you and that pap purveyor!"

"But Gloria, think of the publicity . . . the big parade with the man from Mars! Why your play would run for years!"

"OK, I'll do it!" She said with a big smile and watched the ad-men's gloomy faces change to astonished delight. "There's just one little thing . . . if I win!" She prodded Harry in the chest with a long stiff finger.

"Yes dear . . . anything!"

"YOU have the baby!" The scowl came back to her face. "You utter idiots . . . you misfired missiles! How in the Universe do you think I can play a romantic lead wearing a maternity dress?"

George chuckled with delight at the thought and she turned on him.

"What's so funny, Doctor? And what do you mean I'm disqualified from the contest. What's wrong with me?"

"Not a thing, Miss Manson." He grinned happily at her. "But if you can stand having dinner with a man in an old-fashioned suit, I'll tell you why Mother America should be a contented

cow instead of a tantalizing tigress."

"Hm, this is one orbit I haven't travelled." She smiled and nodded her approval. "Set me a course, Navigator."

They moved towards the door together.

"Doctor! The program tonight . . . have you forgotten?"

George looked back and waved airily. "Don't worry. I'll be there. And we'll name the winner too!"

WELL now, Gloria, the desert!" George was saying. "What'll it be, crepes suzette?"

She smiled across the table. "Mm," she considered the menu carefully. "I think I'll stick to good old American apple pie and cheese."

"A genuine American small town girl, with small town likes and dislikes! That's what you are underneath the glamour. Aren't you?"

She laughed and raised her champagne glass. "And this is from the home town vineyard too?"

George leaned towards her, his face a little flushed with the wine. "Gloria, with your ability as an actress we could play the biggest practical joke in the history of colorvision. If only I dared!"

"What's your idea, George?"

"I'm sick of all this pseudo-scientific nonsense about genet-

ics," he said, "and I'm even sicker of the crass commercialism and political propaganda surrounding this Mother America business."

"George, you surprise me more and more! I thought you did this for the money and publicity, to say nothing of the great honor."

"Stop kidding, Gloria! You know I was ordered to do it by the Department. All I get is an expense account from Dee Lish Baby Foods. The thing that really bothers me is the type of winner I have to pick."

"Have to pick? You have free choice, don't you?"

"Not really. The people who watch that program, from the President on down, including our Director too, expect a sweet wholesome type . . . you know, curvy in the right places like a Miss America but wouldn't think of posing in a bathing suit. They want an adolescent dream girl type, the kind that goes well with a rose-covered cottage and four rosy-cheeked kids all waiting for Daddy to come home."

"But most women work in America today."

"I know but the dream remains, along with the cowboy, the daring Air Force pilot, the self-made business tycoon and all the other romantic stereotypes of the first half of the century. She makes togetherness seem

right, and God knows we have so many people today we're together whether we like it or not. So that's the type I have to pick."

"Where does the joke come in?"

"If you'd play the part of the American dream girl you'd win that contest going away, like a four stage rocket booster."

"But I don't want to have a baby by remote control."

"You wouldn't have to. You can always withdraw before the impregnation ceremony."

"Suppose I do it, what's the point?"

"Well for one thing, you'd show how easily people are fooled by appearances and smart propaganda. As a geneticist I can only go so far and be honest. I can make sure you have good heredity; that you have no obvious physical or mental defects; that your chance of having certain disabling diseases are small; that your intelligence is high, and so on. I can't really measure things such as initiative, wit, courage, determination, all the things that make one human so much better than another of equal physical and mental capacity."

"Educated people know that already."

"True, but it needs constant emphasis or it is forgotten under the propaganda. Besides, I don't believe in mating people like cat-

tle or slaves. That's why this whole thing is a travesty of love and marriage. I hate being used to give it a semblance of scientific authenticity. I'm going to declare the top four contestants equal. They are, as far as I am concerned, genetically speaking. The audience will decide the winner. They'll love it and so will the sponsor. The other three are real American dream girls. I want you to outsmart them at their own game . . . and tell America later what a farce it all was."

"You really are a romantic, underneath the cynicism," Gloria said wonderingly. "I didn't think scientists were built with hearts any more." She reached across and took his hand. "But I like you that way. Do you think I could do it?"

"Easily. Just pretend you are Ellen the Earthling from that comedy of yours. That's the type they want."

"Yes, but when I bow out later they'll be calling me Marina the Martian Menace . . . that won't be so funny."

"They won't, Gloria. You can laugh it off as a publicity stunt and get them laughing with you. Who knows, it might even stop this mad fad of career women having babies without a proper home and a father to raise them."

She laughed. "Are you afraid you're going to be replaced by a

machine, George?" her eyes twinkled with amusement.

He grinned. "Oh, we still have our uses. Time to go. Will you do it?"

She stood up. "I'll play it by ear. If the audience is the type you say they are, it will be a pleasure."

THE parade was over. Now, as they waited for the banquet and the speeches to begin, John Harmon spoke to Turner.

"You're a lucky man, George."

"Why?"

"Spending so much time with Gloria. She had me laughing all the way up Wall Street with her remarks about the parade. If I didn't have to go back to the base tomorrow I'd steal her for a date." He turned to Gloria. "I mean it, honey. You really leave me weightless!"

Gloria smiled at him. "I'll take a recount, John. We can blast off some other time."

After the banquet the Mayor of New York made the major address of the evening. "And so, ladies and gentleman," he concluded, "you have seen today two people who represent the end of one era and the beginning of another. The lovely lady on my right is to be the first Mother America. For the first time in history, our nation is actively planning our future citizens. It is true that for years now, with

the help of the Genetics Laboratories, represented so ably by Doctor Turner, individual citizens have planned their parenthood, but never before have a President and Congress given their approval, their official blessing, for such a purpose. This then is a milestone we have passed, a point in our history we will never forget."

"They'll never forget me either when I back out," Gloria whispered to George. "I'm getting worried. We're in too deep."

"Don't be scared, baby," George said. "I'll get you out of it, if you have to fall sick to do it." He patted her arm reassuringly but somehow, without the rosy glow of a bottle of wine to color this view, the joke didn't seem as funny as it had the previous night.

The Mayor continued. "Another point in our history was passed when this young man on my left, at that time Captain, now Major John Harmon of the Space Force, returned from Mars. He and his crew represent the end of our isolation in space. The Moon, after all, is a satellite of Earth. Mars is another planet, and Major Harmon has landed there. We are not likely in our time to see another such event since the next big step, beyond the Solar System, will require a technology we do not possess. So, ladies and gentlemen, you, to-

night, are witnessing the beginning of a new age, an age of supermen borne by women of America, such as Gloria Manson, and led by heroes such as John Harmon. I propose we drink a toast to them . . . together."

AFTERWARDS, in Gloria's apartment, the three of them sat and talked until late. Then John Harmon looked at his watch and got up to leave.

"I have to catch the ramjet out of La Guardia", he said. "We start planning the next space trip in Colorado tomorrow, or rather this morning. It's been fun." He shook George's hand and kissed Gloria quickly. "I'll be seeing you one of these days."

George shut the door behind him. "I guess I'd better go now," he said.

"No! Have one for the road," Gloria said quickly. "I want to talk to you."

George poured another Scotch. "You still worried?"

"A bit," she admitted. "What is the next step?"

"Now I'm supposed to pick the male donor."

"I thought you'd done that already."

"No. You see we have to know what blood types the female has and what her genetic structure is; whether she has any antibodies against sperm and so on, before we pick the male. To do it

before the winner is picked would entail a lot of unnecessary work."

"Then we still have some time before the impregnation ceremony?"

"I can stall for maybe four weeks . . . no longer. You see I have to consider your cycle too." He got up to go. "Gloria, I guess I was half lit last night. I'm sorry. It was a damn-fool idea."

She came close to him. "But you really do believe in the old-fashioned marriage, even if not in the old-fashioned girl?"

"Yes, I do. I still think people should be in love and not just mated because a calculating machine says they'll produce superior offspring."

"You're sweet." She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. The kiss lasted . . . and lasted. Finally George broke it off.

"My God! he mumbled. "Don't we have enough problems, without this?"

THREE weeks later, on Monday, George announced he had a suitable donor. The New York Genetics Panel, in session, considered the records and announced that permission was granted for one Gloria Manson, spinster, of New York City, to bear a child by artificial impregnation. The date was set for Wednesday. On Tuesday night

George went to Gloria's apartment.

"What are we going to do," Gloria asked as she watched George wearing a path on the rug. "We've left it awfully late."

"I couldn't do anything else," George said. "We can't plead illness as I'd hoped to do. This afternoon the panel decided on a last minute independent medical check to be sure you're OK. That means I can't fake it and there's no time to give you a cold or some mild illness now. Somehow I've got to stall past the fertile period and then we will have another month to think of something."

"How long is the fertile period?"

"Our tests show that in your case it is approximately twenty-four hours and begins about midnight tonight."

"Couldn't I disappear for a day or pretend I'm frightened of having a baby and call it off? Goodness knows we're both getting frightened right now." She poured out two stiff drinks.

"You can't just quit, Gloria. The whole nation has been whipped up into hysteria over this business, both by the politicians in their anticommunist speeches and by the sponsors on Coloraudio system. I never dreamed it could put a whole country into orbit . . . but it has. We'll both be ruined if I can't figure a way out that does-

n't anger the public." He drained his glass and began pacing again.

"If I have to go on with it can't you at least do something to prevent conception?" Gloria asked. "I don't mean, vaccination. I want to have children later. I can stand the ceremony if I know I won't become pregnant."

"In that case I could give you a shot of antiserum against sperm," George said. "That would stop pregnancy all right."

"Would it make me sterile for long?"

"Oh no . . . no! I wouldn't use pooled serum from all types anyway. You see we make some specific serum when we are testing each donor and it works only against the sperm of that particular man."

"Then we're all right? All I need is a shot?"

George shook his head. "I'm afraid to risk it, Gloria. They'll probably examine your blood tomorrow. If they found the specific antibody, or even a general antisperm antibody, that would really get us into trouble for fraud." He shook his head. "No. I'm afraid that's not the answer. I don't know what to do." He poured another drink and downed it.

"George," Gloria wailed, her control breaking at last, "I don't want a test-tube husband, a par-

ent by proxy. I want a man!" She began to cry.

He came over to the couch and dropped down beside her. "Darling, please! Please don't cry. There must be a way to beat this." He took her in his arms.

THE aircar warning light came on and the buzzer sounded. George unhooked the automatic pilot and took over. They swung into University City and across the campus to the Faculty residential area.

"I certainly was lucky to find a job here on retirement from the Space Force," John Harmon said. "It was good of you to invite me to stay the week-end. Are you sure Mrs. Turner won't mind?"

"Quite sure." George smiled. "She's been looking forward to meeting you." He pulled the car into a spacious port and opened the front door of the house for Harmon. A tall, good-looking brunette moved to meet them.

"So nice to meet you, Mrs. . . ." Harmon began automatically. "Great mountains of the moon! Gloria . . . Gloria Manson!" He turned to George. "You didn't tell me."

"You mean you didn't know?" Gloria asked, and kissed him affectionately.

"I found out that he didn't. He was back in space at the time we were married." George said.

"I wanted to surprise him." A happy smile creased his face.

Harmon stared at him. "Oh no!" he said and began to laugh. They watched him, astonished. He tried to talk. "George . . . ha, ha . . . Wonderful!" He convulsed again, struggled to a chair and collapsed. "The boy . . ." he whispered weakly between great whoops.

"The boy? Then you guessed!" The wide smile split George's face again.

"Yes, that smile . . . couldn't miss it. But how?" Harmon had recovered. They went into the living room and sat down to talk.

"So there we were," George concluded, "tanking up on lox and nothing coming out but smoke. I was getting a bit woozy when Gloria asked me what time it was."

I looked at my watch. "It's midnight," I said. That did it.

"Midnight!" she screeched and gave me the green-eyed tiger look. "Well, George Turner, maybe you can't think of something . . . but I can!"

"About nine in the morning the secretary of the panel called my room at the hotel. 'The ceremony is at ten, Doctor!' she said. 'We are waiting for you.'"

"Man, what a head I had! You could have pushed the De-struct button and I'd never have known. Anyway I got to the hos-

pital and there was Gloria, looking absolutely beautiful. There were press photographers everywhere. We went through with the ceremony and that was that. Nine months later, with a lot of sonic booming, Boy America was born. You saw him today."

"But he looks like you," John protested.

"He should," Gloria said. "He's his."

"But . . ." John hesitated. "I don't want to pry, but how can you be sure?"

Gloria laughed. "Well, I know what we did the first couple of hours after midnight. You tell him the rest, George."

"There isn't much else to tell," George said. "After the ceremony I gave her a shot of the specific antiserum as soon as I could get her alone. Later the committee examined her blood. They found she was pregnant so

nobody even thought of testing for antisperm bodies. Then the boy was born. Naturally I was a bit concerned. I took blood samples and did genetic studies. There was no doubt. He was my son."

"And nobody ever suspected?" Harmon asked.

"No," Turner said. "The law prescribes examination before pregnancy but not afterwards. We were married three months later and everybody was very happy. As for the boy looking like me, everyone who has noticed it assumes I picked a donor like myself. It would be a natural inclination."

"So much for planned parenthood in the new era," Harmon chuckled. "The poor Mayor of New York! If only he knew." He grinned slyly. "Somehow I always did like the old way best."

THE END

As a service to our readers, we list the "Hugo" award winners for 1960:

Best Fan Mag: "Who Killed Science Fiction"—Earl Kemp

Best SF Artist: Ed Emshwiller

Best Short Story: "The Longest Voyage" by Poul Anderson

Best Dramatic Work: "The Twilight Zone"

Best SF Magazine: *Analog*

Best Novel: "A Canticle for Leibowitz" by Walter Miller, Jr.

These were presented at the 19th annual World Science Fiction Convention held in Seattle, Washington, September 1-4.

THE STRANGE CASE OF

MURRAY LEINSTER

By SAM MOSKOWITZ



THE whole thing began when the clock on the Metropolitan Tower began to run backwards." That was the opening sentence of *The Runaway Skyscraper* which appeared in the February 22, 1919, issue of ARGOSY, and those were the words with which Murray Leinster began his science fiction writing career. Already a veteran with two years of steady magazine sales behind him, young Leinster had sold ARGOSY a series of "Happy Village" stories and was fed up with predigested pabulum. There would be no more in that series for a

while, he told Matthew White, Jr., since he was working on a story with the aforementioned opening lines.

"By return mail," recalls Leinster, "I got a letter telling me to let him see it when I finished. So I had to write it or admit I was lying."

At the time the story was written The Metropolitan Tower, home office of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., New York, was one of the tallest and most distinctive skyscrapers in the city, topped by a clock that was a city landmark. Readers of ARGOSY

*Editor's Note: Due to the fact that Murray Leinster has written hundreds of science fiction stories over a 43 year period it is impossible to cover them all in detail in a single article. Therefore, the Leinster writing career is treated primarily in its early phases. This was also true of the Robert Heinlein article published a few issues back. To properly evaluate the remainder of the works of these two writers another article on each would be required. Such "sequel" articles on these authors will be published if there is a strong reader demand for them.

were enthralled to read of the remarkable journey of this skyscraper back into time to a period hundreds of years before the white men appeared on this continent. In the process, some 2,000 workers in the skyscraper find themselves confronted with the task of obtaining enough food to eat and suitable fuel to run the building's mammoth generators. Little help can be expected from the few thoroughly "shaken" Indians who have witnessed this strange aberration in time. The scientific "explanation" that the skyscraper had sunk back in time instead of down into a pool of water created by a spring beneath it taxed one's credulity only slightly less than the unimpaired functioning of the entire elevator, telephone and cooking appliances of the building, even though outside sources of power were hundreds of years away. Leinster's characters poked around a bit, but since the author couldn't quite seem to figure out the solution of the sustenance problem of the skyscraper's inhabitants himself, he had the hero regain the equilibrium of the structure in its own time by pouring soapsuds into the sub-surface water. The building reappears at the same time it left and no one believes the story of its occupants.

A readership that was still completing Garrett Smith's novel

that whisked them into the future of *After A Million Years*, and had accepted the revival of Aztec gods in the modern world projected by Francis Stevens in *Citadel of Fear* only months earlier, was not inclined to quibble over "details." They greeted Murray Leinster's effort with an enthusiasm that launched one of the most fabulous writing careers in science fiction history. Forty-three years later, Murray Leinster ranks among the six favorite modern writers of science fiction. No living s-f writer has had more of his stories anthologized. He has written such acknowledged modern classics as *First Contact*, *The Strange Case of John Kingman*, *Symbiosis*, *A Logic Named Joe*, and *The Lonely Planet*.

Other writers who started and achieved fame in the same period as Leinster, including Ray Cummings, Garrett Smith, Victor Rousseau, Francis Stevens, Homer Eon Flint, Austin Hall and J. U. Giesy are dead; their work lives only in the nostalgic memories of a dwindling group of old-time readers. But their contemporary, Murray Leinster, is so much alive that in 1956 his novelette *Exploration Team* received the coveted Hugo as the best story in its class that year, and in 1960 his novel *Pirates of Ersatz* was nominated for the best novel of the year.

WILLIAM Fitzgerald Jenkins was born in Norfolk, Va. in 1896. His alter ego, Murray Leinster, would not come into being until he had passed his 21st birthday. His family tree has roots deep in colonial times; a great-grandfather, seven times removed, was governor of North Carolina. Another of his roots was nourished in Leinster County, Ireland, inhabited by a people proud in the knowledge that they were the last portion of that country to give up their independence.

His educational background is the despair of every English and Journalism major in the country; it ended abruptly after only three months of the eighth grade, never to be resumed. Young Jenkins' burning ambition was to be a scientist, and inquiry into the nature of things prompted him to buy materials to build a glider, which he successfully flew at Sandstorm Hill, Cape Henry, Va., in 1909, winning a prize from FLY, the first aeronautical magazine.

The same year he placed an essay about Robert E. Lee in the VIRGINIAN PILOT, making that his first published work at the age of 13. To earn a living, he worked as an office boy, writing at night. At 17 he began to connect with fillers and epigrams at SMART SET, the "New Yorker" of pre-World War I days. Such frag-

ments did not constitute a living, so Will Jenkins set his sights on the pulps which were replacing the dime-novel as the reading matter of American youth. The editors of the SMART SET, George Jean Nathan and H. L. Mencken, suggested he use a pen name so as not to hurt his reputation in the "big time." Jenkins thought this was Grade A advice and concocted Murray Leinster out of his family lineage.

He had moved to Newark, N. J., to work as a bookkeeper for the Prudential Insurance Co. and that city later served as the locale of a number of his stories, most notably *The Incredible Invasion*. Clicking regularly at Munsey and other publishing houses, Jenkins resigned his post with the Prudential on his 21st birthday and, outside of a stint in the Office of War Information in World War II, has never held a salaried position since.

In 1919, Street & Smith made plans to publish THRILL BOOK, a magazine with heavy emphasis on science fiction, fantasy, supernatural and off trail stories. Before the appearance of the first issue, March 1, 1919, editors Eugene Clancy and Harold Hershey found new fantasies difficult to obtain. They dropped the notion of an all-fantasy periodical and balanced the magazine with straight adventure and mystery stories.

HERSHEY had read *The Runaway Skyscraper* by Murray Leinster in ARGOSY a few weeks earlier and was also familiar with the Will Jenkins stories in SMART SET. He urged the young writer to try his hand at science fiction for THRILL BOOK. The result was three stories. The first, *A Thousand Degrees Below Zero*, appeared in the July 15, 1919, number, and involved an inventor who succeeds in building a machine which will draw all heat from objects it is directed upon, resulting in death for living things and brittle disintegration for inanimate objects. A vigorous bout with the United States government ends in his defeat, but this story pattern, with a series of interchangeable inventions, was to remain a Leinster standard for the next 25 years.

Reader popularity warranted a sequel, *The Silver Menace*, printed in two installments in the Sept. 1 and Sept. 15, 1919, numbers of THRILL BOOK. The *dramatis personae* is the same, but this time the world is threatened by a swiftly multiplying life form that virtually turns the seas to glimmering jello.

The final issue of THRILL BOOK, Oct. 15, 1919, carried Leinster's third story, *Juju*, which was a straightforward adventure novelette set in an African locale. What makes this story worth mentioning is that by this time

the "Murray Leinster" name rated the cover of the magazine.

A personal fascination with Jean Henri Fabre's books on insects inspired Will Jenkins to write *The Mad Planet*, the first of a trilogy which collectively rates among his best if not his finest contributions to science fiction. A secondary incentive was the desire to confound the literary critics who claimed that stories with little or no dialogue could not retain a modern reader's interest. *The Mad Planet* scored sensationally upon its appearance in ARGOSY for June 12, 1920. It depicted a world of the far distant future where climatic conditions had made it possible for insects and plants to grow to gigantic proportions and mankind was reduced to a primitive, hunted state. *The Mad Planet* held readers in thrall as Burl, a primitive genius, slowly begins to lead man back out of savagery. *The Mad Planet* possessed epic qualities that struck the chord of universal appeal.

The sequel, *Red Dust*, in ARGOSY for April 2, 1921, is an even better story than the original. Burl's adventures and explorations thrillingly expand the scope of man's knowledge and hopes. Each time these two stories have been reprinted, in AMAZING STORIES in 1926; in TALES OF WONDER, 1939, and FANTASTIC NOVELS, 1948-49, a new generation of

readers put the stamp of endorsement on Leinster's decade-defying artistry.

Finally, 22 years after the appearance of the first story, Will Jenkins completed the trilogy with *Nightmare Planet* in the June, 1953, issue of SCIENCE-FICTION PLUS. It was an older, more philosophical, more thoughtful Jenkins writing in this story, but the magic of the first two carried through. Changing the locale to another planet for scientific reasons, he united the three in hard covers as *The Forgotten Planet*, a book of such magnetic appeal that it is unlikely to become a forgotten classic.

FROM 1923 on, one of the pillars of good fantasy in the United States was a magazine titled WEIRD TALES. Jenkins' initial contribution to this magazine, *The Oldest Story in the World*, was done more as a favor to editor Farnsworth Wright than for monetary reward. A tale of greed and torture in Old India, it emerged the favorite in the Aug. 1925, issue in which it appeared, receiving wildly enthusiastic accolades from fellow writers Seabury Quinn and Frank Belknap Long as "equal to Kipling."

A three-part novel, *The Strange People*, began in the March, 1928 issue of WEIRD TALES.

This story about a group of foreigners held in bondage in a New England valley because of an artificially-induced skin condition that resembled leprosy scored very highly with the readers and kept the name of Murray Leinster before the readers in the fantasy field at a time when most of his efforts were concentrated elsewhere.

In 1929, Will Jenkins submitted a novelette entitled *Darkness on Fifth Avenue* to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, along with a prospectus for three sequels. Howard Bloomfield, editor, returned the story noting that though it might qualify as a detective yarn on a technicality, its suggested sequels could in no fashion make a similar claim and recommended that it be tried with ARGOSY. The editors of that magazine, sensing a good thing, gave it the cover of the Nov. 30, 1929, issue, and the reader approbation to the manner in which a detective, with nothing but common sense, hunts down and defeats a brilliant scientific criminal who has succeeded in building a device which will absorb all light from a given area in which he desires to function, was overwhelming. (Note: *Darkness on Fifth Avenue* will be reprinted in a forthcoming issue of FANTASTIC.)

The sequel, *The City of the Blind*, went into print in the

Dec. 28, 1929, issue and this time the evil genius extends the radius of his machine so it will keep New York in perpetual impenetrable darkness until it pays ransom and delivers up or destroys the men who are fighting against him. A side effect of the process of drawing light from the atmosphere is the generation of heat. This heat, over so large an area, rises, permitting cooler currents to sweep in beneath. The result is tremendous storms accompanying the blackness.

When this second attempt is overcome, the storm-creating effect becomes the focus of the third story in the series, *The Storm That Had to Be Stopped* in ARGOSY for March, 1930. Winds of many times hurricane force devastate New York State and the arch criminal demands power and money to stop them. U.S. tanks and scientific deduction foil this plot only to fall into a fourth and final situation as related in *The Man Who Put Out the Sun*, in ARGOSY for June 14, 1930. Herein, the Heaviside Layer is impregnated with an electric field which renders the air no longer transparent. If the problem is not quickly solved, the world will freeze to death. In the corniest action of the group of stories, the errant scientist is finally destroyed and all is made right with the world.

A MAJORITY of the Leinster stories underscore that it is the *battle*, not the ultimate victory that is important. Man courageously, sometimes magnificently, enters the fray against a mindless, implacable creature, phenomenon or condition. Even though in some cases a man has caused the situation, he is rarely the fundamental antagonist.

This quality reappears graphically in much of the current Leinster work: *Critical Difference* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, July, 1956), where man struggles to keep an entire planet from freezing over after sun has cut down heat output; *Sand Doom* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION, Dec., 1955) where man is confronted by the spectre of death by the frightful heat and the monumental tonnage of shifting sand; *Exploration Team* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, March, 1956) relates how a new planetary colony is almost destroyed, then ingeniously works to stay alive against the maniacal viciousness of alien beasts; *The Swamp Was Upside Down* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Sept., 1956), shows men on a water planet desperate in their efforts to prevent the sea from overwhelming them and to keep their land from sliding into the ocean. Another group of stories, termed the "medic" series, including *Ribbon in the Sky*, *The Mutant*

Weapon, The Grandfathers' War and *Pariah Planet* are chronicles of medicine against other worldly disease.

Basically, Jenkins, writing as Murray Leinster, does not recognize the struggle of man against himself. He recognizes man against nature and he will concede the *appearance* of man against man but discredits the Freudian concept of man against himself.

Perhaps an explanation of this attitude may be found in Jenkins' religious faith. Born an Episcopalian, he married a Catholic with the understanding that the children would be raised as Catholics. Four daughters resulted from the union and, in order to understand them better and answer their questions intelligently, Jenkins began to study the Catholic religion. The more he learned the more certain he became that these were beliefs he could live in harmony with, because they represented his attitudes even as a youth. Like many converts, he is, if anything, a more enthusiastic and outspoken supporter of his faith than most born into it. Yet, as a literary artist, no evidence of proselytizing appears in his works. Nevertheless, Catholicism has on occasion expressed reservations concerning psychiatry and Murray Leinster's stories reflect this fact. There is little probing for

motivation. Things happen and man responds to the event. In science fiction where what happens is frequently more important than why it happens or to whom it happens, this propensity has not been noticed.

TANKS, an exceedingly well constructed short story which appeared in the very first issue of ASTOUNDING STORIES Jan., 1930, presents a pivotal incident in a war between the east and the west. Technically the story is noteworthy for the importance it sets on tank warfare. It also brings into play the value of helicopters in the battle area, but no *reason* is given for the war to which the reader is a spectator. While it is evident that wars are planned by men and men have motivations, for all practical purposes warfare is handled as though it is an act of *nature*.

The Fifth Dimension Catapult (ASTOUNDING STORIES, Jan., 1931) is a take-off on the once-honorable theme of there being another world in the *fourth* dimension. Leinster says, in fact, that since the fourth dimension is *time*, only our past or future may be found there, but to find another *world* we must explore the *fifth* dimension. This story is closely allied to the scientific romances so popular in the old ARGOSY and made reading good enough to justify a sequel, *The Fifth Di-*

mension Tube (ASTOUNDING STORIES, Jan., 1933), in which that other world is more thoroughly explored and the fight is joined against the *jungles* which are gradually destroying the cities of the intelligent race of that dimension.

One of the few stories where Leinster takes any pains to bring his villain into focus is the four-part novel, *Murder Madness* which ran serially in ASTOUNDING STORIES beginning in May, 1930. A man known as The Master gains control over a good part of South America by introducing a drug into the water which needs an antidote at various intervals to prevent the populace from going berserk and killing one another. People are dependent upon the antidote for their sanity, just as diabetics are dependent on insulin to maintain a normal life. The Master is eventually introduced to the readers as a rather kindly old man whose ultimate purpose is to use his dictatorial powers for the good of mankind.

Heroes are something else again, and Leinster will frequently have two or more in a single story. He is also inclined to attach a nationality to his heroes, so we find in the *Darkness* series the Irish detective Hines and the accented German scientist Schäaf. In *The Power Planet* (AMAZING STORIES, June, 1931) a

prophetic space story of a disk-shaped station in space, *not an earth satellite*, which converts the sun's heat into power which it transmits to earth, the heroes are again a German, Ferdel, who commands the station and will not surrender it to a war rocket from earth and a Russian Jew, Skeptsky, who sacrifices his life to blow up the threatening vessel.

Morale (ASTOUNDING STORIES, Dec., 1931), finds a ship beaching itself on a New Jersey shore during war time, blowing up to release a tank many times larger than a house which wreaks havoc in the countryside with the intent of pressuring back thousands of troops from the front to combat it. It is eventually destroyed by its own supporting bombing planes through a trick played on its crew. The story is of interest primarily because it suggests LST's for landing tanks and air support for land armor.

FAR more prophetic was *Invasion* (ASTOUNDING STORIES, March, 1933) where the countries of the world are divided into two factions, the *United Nations* and the Com-Pubs (communists). The Russians, who have been leading in space exploration, build a space ship which is detoured in space so that it will appear to be a visitor from Mars.

This first lures the air fleets of the United Nations to investigate, then traps them between two spheres of force so that the communists can conquer the free world at will. While this was not a particularly outstanding story, it was a chillingly correct appraisal of future political conditions.

The Racketeer Ray (AMAZING STORIES, Feb., 1932) belongs to the same class of stories typified by the *Darkness* series. An electromagnetic beam, so powerful that it can draw anything of metal and even siphon off electrical current, gets into the hands of gangsters and is used for criminal purposes. When the gangsters are eventually tracked down, one of them, upon learning that the machine's range is infinite, turns it on the moon overhead and disappears into space clinging to the apparatus. This is his alternative to a life in prison.

Bombing from heights of eight miles up through the use of infra-red ray cameras is a conjecture that Leinster used first in *Morale* and then again in *Politics* (AMAZING STORIES, June 1932) wherein political chicanery almost causes the sinking of the fleet and the surrender of the United States. Here, the value of pocket battleships such as Germany used in World War II is introduced and the expanding role of the air craft carrier and

air power are given some recognition, even though it is a battleship with automatic range finders that eventually wins the day.

Leinster's formula of giving a scientific invention to gangsters to be used for criminal purposes is repeated again in *The Sleep Gas*, a long novelette in ARGOSY, Jan. 16, 1932. With most writers, a formula such as this would comprise hack work, but the care with which this story is plotted and the realism with which it is told, combined with a very evident and intimate knowledge of New York make this exposition of the use of a sleep gas for criminal purposes an outstanding effort. Another mark in its favor was convincing scientific explanation.

Leinster's interest in science was sustained throughout his writing career and he has always had a home laboratory. As a result, even when he was improvising his science out of blue sky, it was so convincing that research was often needed to disprove it.

The Earth Shaker, a three-part novel beginning in ARGOSY for April 15, 1933, adopts another Leinster formula that originated as far back as *A Thousand Degrees Below Zero* in THRILL BOOK. A scientist discovers a means of manufacturing earthquakes through the use of ultrasonic waves and begins to shake

down city after city in an attempt to establish himself as dictator. In an exciting and very readable story he is finally tracked down.

BACK in the 1930's, Murray Leinster, under his own name as Will Jenkins was already appearing in SATURDAY EVENING POST, COLLIERS, LIBERTY, AMERICAN and other mass-readership magazines of the period. He was in every sense a cut above the markets in which his science fiction appeared. His short story, *A Very Nice Family*, won a \$1,000 first prize in LIBERTY at that time and was subsequently reprinted some 25 times. Hard cover book and moving picture sales were also accumulating. Eventually, out of over 1,300 stories, one-third would be sold to the big-time slicks and a dozen would go into moving pictures.

However, guaranteed assignments from science fiction magazines were generally filled, even at their relatively low rates, because they took care of periods when Jenkins had nothing else on fire and because he had always remained an avid fan of the medium.

When F. Orlin Tremaine assumed editorship of ASTOUNDING STORIES in 1933, he inaugurated a policy of "thought variants" or stories with daring new ideas in order to make a bid for field leadership. An old friend of Jenkins,

he approached him for stories under the Leinster name.

Of all authors in the field, Jenkins seemed a poor choice, for while strong on gadgets he appeared limited in plot variations. At that very moment he was putting the final touches on a short novel for ARGOSY, *War of the Purple Gas*, in which New Asia was again conquering the United States, this time with a device that disintegrated metals. It seemed unlikely that new ideas could be ground from such grist.

His first contribution to Tremaine, *Beyond the Sphinx's Cave* in the November, 1933 ASTOUNDING STORIES told of the discovery of the mythological creatures of Greece in caves beneath that country. It suggested radioactive mutations of humans as one of the answers to their existence and the Gorgon's head became an artistically wrought paralysis ray.

This was merely a test run. The story that followed, *Sideways in Time*, (ASTOUNDING STORIES, June, 1934) introduced an idea on time travel which had never previously been used. It suggested that the past, future and present travel not in a straight line, but like a curving river, similar to Dunne's theories. Not only events of the actual past, present and future are blended, but time tracks that never happened except in "The Worlds of

If." Due to a fault in time, segments of all of these elements superimpose simultaneously, creating a world where Roman legions still march, the South has won the Civil War, Chinese have settled America, pre-historic monsters roam mindlessly and Indians raid towns, all in one overpowering melange. The misfortune was that Jenkins took only 20,000 words instead of 100,000 to expound his hypothesis. The result was an outline more than a story but many other authors reaped the benefits of the new approach.

Sideways in Time proved no one-shot success. Altering his old formula of letting a remarkable invention fall into the hands of a criminal to let the emphasis rest on the extrapolative rather than the detection aspects, Murray Leinster's *The Mole Pirate* in the November, 1934 ASTOUNDING STORIES easily ranks among the half-dozen best science fiction stories he has produced. The seldom-used concept of a machine whose atomic structure can be altered so that it can serve as an *underground* ship, passing wraithlike through all solid substances offered fascinating and highly dramatic sequences in an immensely satisfying conjecture.

Proxima Centauri which ran only a few months later was as remarkable an effort. Readers of the March, 1935 ASTOUNDING

STORIES were treated to one of the earlier stories of interstellar space ships that were worlds in themselves, as well as the presentation of a logical civilization of intelligent carnivorous plant life with intimations of their psychology and motivations!

JENKINS was not letting his ASTOUNDINGS efforts distract him from ARGOSY. *The Rollers* in the Dec. 29, 1934 issue of that magazine was a dramatic story of a man who created super-tornadoes by temporarily nullifying gravity in small areas. *The Morrison Monument* in the Aug. 10, 1935 issue was intended to be the time travel story to end all time travel stories, pointing out that time machines might remain permanently fixed, indestructibly present in the same spot for the entire duration of their journey into time, to be viewed by generation after generation of humans. *The Extra-Intelligence* in the Nov. 30, 1935 issue was one of his weaker efforts, however, dealing with the revival of the dead and the efforts of a disembodied super-intelligence to take over at the time the feat is accomplished.

Much more successful was *The Fourth Dimensional Demonstrator*, one of the few really funny stories ever to appear in science fiction. A machine is built which, by moving back in time, will bring into being a replica of the

object placed upon it. First used for duplicating valuables, it accidentally copies fiancées and police officers, instituting a frolic that has made it a frequently anthologized favorite.

Leinster's last science fiction effort in the thirties was a novel, *The Incredible Invasion*, a tale more of the variety that he had popularized in *ARGOSY*, telling of invaders from another dimension who paralyze the entire city of Newark, N.J. and proceed to loot it until stopped. Beginning in *ASTOUNDING STORIES*, August, 1936, and running for six installments, it belongs in the category of "good fun."

The slant in science fiction began to change. An entirely new approach was taken with the stress more heavily on the sociological and psychological impact of future changes than on action. Many of the old time favorites were unable to adjust and were replaced by bright new stars bearing such now-familiar names as Heinlein, de Camp, van Vogt, Del Rey, Sturgeon, Asimov and Hubbard. Leinster did not appear to belong, he was identified with an outdated era.

Then, in 1942, several short stories by Murray Leinster appeared in *ASTOUNDING*. Those in the "know" passed these off as fillers made possible by the war-time shortage of writers. Then, Will Jenkins lowered the boom. A

novelette appeared in *ASTOUNDING*, May, 1945, titled *First Contact* which broached the idea of meeting aliens of a high technological stature from an entirely new angle. An interstellar earth ship meets another ship of comparably advanced design in the great vastness between star systems. It does not dare ignore the contact for the ship may trail them back to earth and there is no way to be sure whether it constitutes a menace to mankind. The alien ship is in a similar dilemma. The situation is eventually resolved by an exchange of ships so that both groups can benefit from new knowledge without revealing their location.

THIS aspect of the problems of meeting another intelligent race had never been posed or evaluated previously. Every top writer in the field stood at attention and saluted. Anthology appearances began to multiply and the story was swiftly accepted as a classic of modern science fiction.

The same year, *ARGOSY*, now a slicked-up men's magazine, followed up the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima with a two-part short novel, *The Murder of the U.S.A.* under the Will Jenkins name. This story was one of the most remarkably accurate short-range expositions to appear in science-fiction. The

United States of the near future is armed with batteries of inter-continental ballistic missiles, propelled by rockets and armed with nuclear warheads. These are situated in bombproof underground bunkers to be used as a nuclear deterrent. Suddenly, one-third of the population of the U.S.A. is destroyed by a sneak attack. The story then takes on the aspect of an international murder mystery. Since many countries have the capacity to deliver such a blow and the rockets came from the poles not implicating any one nation, the United States works to find out who is the international "murderer" while the whole world sweats. If the country that sent the bombs tries to follow up its advantage with an invasion, it will immediately expose itself to the retaliatory effect of the hundreds of American

nuclear warheads.

In 1919 Will Jenkins could write scientific romances like *The Mad Planet* that fitted with the best of them. In 1929, science fiction detective stories, as typified by *Darkness on Fifth Avenue*, were widely imitated. His predictions of tank and aerial warfare appeared extremely cogent in the early thirties and when new ideas or "thought variants" were demanded he rose to the challenge with *Sideways in Time*.

When 1945 came, he proved himself master of the specialized nuances of a more sophisticated variety of science fiction in *First Contact* and a frightening prophet of nuclear doom in *Murder of the U.S.A.*, launching into a new career in the science fiction world which is still very much in progress.

THE END

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The Cosmic Express

By JACK WILLIAMSON

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

THE year 1928 was a great year of discovery for AMAZING STORIES. They were uncovering new talent at such a great rate, (Harl Vincent, David H. Keller, E. E. Smith, Philip Francis Nowlan, Fletcher Pratt and Miles J. Breuer); that Jack Williamson barely managed to become one of a distinguished group of discoveries by stealing the cover of the December issue for his first story *The Metal Man*.

A disciple of A. Merritt, he attempted to imitate in style, mood and subject the magic of that late lamented master of fantasy. The imitation found great favor from the readership and almost instantly Jack Williamson became an important name on the contents page of AMAZING STORIES. He followed his initial success with two short novels, *The Green Girl* in AMAZING STORIES and *The Alien Intelligence* in SCIENCE WONDER STORIES, another Gernsback publication. Both of

these stories were close copies of A. Merritt, whose style and method Jack Williamson parlayed into popularity for eight years.

Yet the strange thing about it was that Jack Williamson was one of the most versatile science fiction authors ever to sit down at the typewriter. When the vogue for science-fantasy altered to super science, he created the memorable super lock-picker *Giles Habilula* as the major attraction in a rousing trio of space operas, *The Legion of Space*, *The Cometeers* and *One Against the Legion*. When grim realism was the order of the day, he produced *Crucible of Power* and when they wanted extrapolated theory in present tense, he assumed the disguise of Will Stewart and popularized the concept of contra-terrene matter in science fiction with *Seetee Ship* and *Seetee Shock*. Finally, when only psychological studies of the future would do, he produced "With

Folded Hands . . . " . . . And Searching Mind."

The Cosmic Express is of special interest because it was written during Williamson's A. Merritt "kick," when he was writing little else but, and it gave the earliest indication of a more general capability. The lightness of the handling is especially modern, barely avoiding the farcical by the validity of the notion that wireless transmission of matter is the next big transportation frontier to be conquered. It is especially important because it stylistically forecast a later trend to accept the background for granted, regardless of the quantity of wonders, and proceed with the story. With only a few thousand scanning-disk television sets in existence at the time of the writing, the surmise that this media would be a natural for westerns was particularly astute.

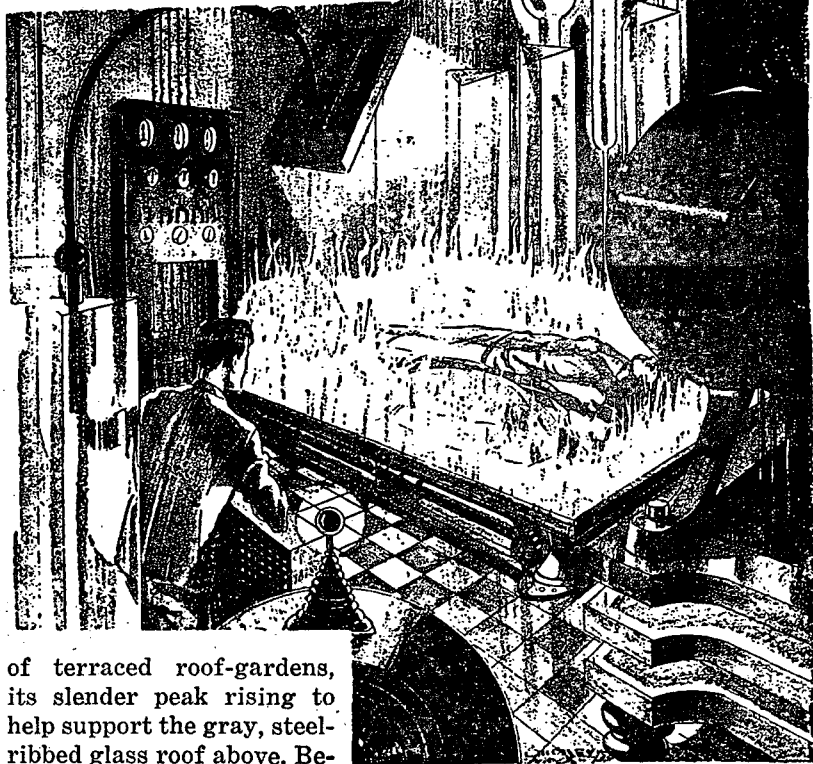
Jack Williamson was born in 1908 in the Arizona territory when covered wagons were the primary form of transportation

and apaches still raided the settlers. His father was a cattle man, but for young Jack, the ranch was anything but glamorous. "My days were filled," he remembers, "with monotonous rounds of what seemed an endless, heart-breaking war with drought and frost and dust-storms, poison-weeds and hail, for the sake of survival on the Llano Estacada." The discovery of AMAZING STORIES was the escape he sought and his goal was to be a science fiction writer. He labored to this end and the first he knew that a story of his had been accepted was when he bought the December, 1929 issue of AMAZING STORIES. Since then, he has written millions of words of science fiction and has gone on record as follows: "I feel that science-fiction is the folklore of the new world of science, and the expression of man's reaction to a technological environment. By which I mean that it is the most interesting and stimulating form of literature today."

MR. ERIC STOKES-HARDING tumbled out of the rumpled bed-clothing, a striking slender figure in purple-striped pajamas. He smiled fondly across to the other of the twin beds, where Nada, his pretty bride, lay quiet beneath light silk covers. With a groan, he stood up and began a series of fantastic

bending exercises. But after a few half-hearted movements, he gave it up, and walked through an open door into a small bright room, its walls covered with book-cases and also with scientific appliances that would have been strange to the man of four or five centuries before, when the Age of Aviation was beginning.

Yawning, Mr. Eric Stokes-Harding stood before the great open window, staring out. Below him was a wide, park-like space, green with emerald lawns, and bright with flowering plants. Two hundred yards across it rose an immense pyramidal building—an artistic structure, gleaming with white marble and bright metal, striped with the verdure



of terraced roof-gardens, its slender peak rising to help support the gray, steel-ribbed glass roof above. Beyond, the park stretched away in illimitable vistas, broken with the graceful columned buildings

Suddenly there was a sharp tingling sensation where they touched the polished surface.

that held up the great glass roof.

Above the glass, over this New York of 2432 A. D., a freezing blizzard was sweeping. But small concern was that to the lightly clad man at the window, who was inhaling deeply the fragrant air from the plants below—air kept, winter and summer, exactly at 20° C.

With another yawn, Mr. Eric Stokes-Harding turned back to the room, which was bright with the rich golden light that poured in from the suspended globes of the cold ato-light that illuminated the snow-covered city. With a distasteful grimace, he seated himself before a broad, paper-littered desk, sat a few minutes leaning back, with his hands clasped behind his head. At last he straightened reluctantly, slid a small typewriter out of its drawer, and began pecking at it impatiently.

For Mr. Eric Stokes-Harding was an author. There was a whole shelf of his books on the wall, in bright jackets, red and blue and green, that brought a thrill of pleasure to the young novelist's heart when he looked up from his clattering machine.

He wrote "thrilling action romances," as his enthusiastic publishers and television directors said, "of ages past, when men were men. Red-blooded heroes responding vigorously to the stirring passions of primordial life!"

HE WAS impartial as to the source of his thrills—provided they were distant enough from modern civilization. His hero was likely to be an ape-man roaring through the jungle, with a bloody rock in one hand and a beautiful girl in the other. Or a cowboy, "hard-riding, hard-shooting," the vanishing hero of the ancient ranches. Or a man marooned with a lovely woman on a desert South Sea island. His heroes were invariably strong, fearless, resourceful fellows, who could handle a club on equal terms with a cave-man, or call science to aid them in defending a beautiful mate from the terrors of a desolate wilderness.

And a hundred million read Eric's novels, and watched the dramatization of them on the television screens. They thrilled at the simple, romantic lives his heroes led, paid him handsome royalties, and subconsciously shared his opinion that civilization had taken all the best from the life of man.

Eric had settled down to the artistic satisfaction of describing the sensuous delight of his hero in the roasted marrow-bones of a dead mammoth, when the pretty woman in the other room stirred, and presently came tripping into the study, gay and vivacious, and—as her husband of a few months most justly

thought—altogether beautiful in a bright silk dressing gown.

Recklessly, he slammed the machine back into its place, and resolved to forget that his next "red-blooded action thriller" was due in the publisher's office at the end of the month. He sprang up to kiss his wife, held her embraced for a long happy moment. And then they went hand in hand, to the side of the room and punched a series of buttons on a panel—a simple way of ordering breakfast sent up the automatic shaft from the kitchens below.

Nada Stokes-Harding was also an author. She wrote poems—"back to nature stuff"—simple lyrics of the sea, of sunsets, of bird songs, of bright flowers and warm winds, of thrilling communion with Nature, and growing things. Men read her poems and called her a genius. Even though the whole world had grown up into a city, the birds were extinct, there were no wild flowers, and no one had time to bother about sunsets.

"Eric, darling," she said, "isn't it terrible to be cooped up here in this little flat, away from the things we both love?"

"Yes, dear. Civilization has ruined the world. If we could only have lived a thousand years ago, when life was simple and natural, when men hunted and killed their meat, instead of drinking synthetic stuff, when men still had

the joys of conflict, instead of living under glass, like hot-house flowers."

"If we could only go somewhere—"

"There isn't anywhere to go. I write about the West, Africa, South Sea Islands. But they were all filled up two hundred years ago. Pleasure resorts, sanatoriums, cities, factories."

"If only we lived on Venus! I was listening to a lecture on the television, last night. The speaker said that the Planet Venus is younger than the Earth, that it has not cooled so much. It has a thick, cloudy atmosphere, and low, rainy forests. There's simple, elemental life there—like Earth had before civilization ruined it."

"Yes, Kinsley, with his new infra-red ray telescope, that penetrates the cloud layers of the planet, proved that Venus rotates in about the same period as Earth; and it must be much like Earth was a million years ago."

"Eric, I wonder if we could go there! It would be so thrilling to begin life like the characters in your stories, to get away from this hateful civilization, and live natural lives. Maybe a rocket—"

THE young author's eyes were glowing. He skipped across the floor, seized Nada, kissed her ecstatically. "Splendid! Think of hunting in the virgin forest, and

bringing the game home to you! But I'm afraid there is no way. —Wait! The Cosmic Express."

"The Cosmic Express?"

"A new invention. Just perfected a few weeks ago, I understand. By Ludwig Von der Valls, the German physicist."

"I've quit bothering about science. It has ruined nature, filled the world with silly, artificial people, doing silly, artificial things."

"But this is quite remarkable, dear. A new way to travel—by ether!"

"By ether!"

"Yes. You know of course that energy and matter are interchangeable terms; both are simply etheric vibration, of different sorts."

"Of course. That's elementary." She smiled proudly. "I can give you examples, even of the change. The disintegration of the radium atom, making helium and lead and *energy*. And Millikan's old proof that his Cosmic Ray is generated when particles of electricity are united to form an atom."

"Fine! I thought you said you weren't a scientist." He glowed with pride. "But the method, in the new Cosmic Express, is simply to convert the matter to be carried into power, send it out as a radiant beam and focus the beam to convert it back into atoms at the destination."

"But the amount of energy must be terrific—"

"It is. You know short waves carry more energy than long ones. The Express Ray is an electromagnetic vibration of frequency far higher than that of even the Cosmic ray, and correspondingly more powerful and more penetrating."

The girl frowned, running slim fingers through golden-brown hair. "But I don't see how they get any recognizable object, not even how they get the radiation turned back into matter."

"The beam is focused, just like the light that passes through a camera lens. The photographic lens, using light rays, picks up a picture and reproduces it again on the plate—just the same as the Ex-Press Ray picks up an object and sets it down on the other side of the world."

"An analogy from television might help. You know that by means of the scanning disc, the picture is transformed into mere rapid fluctuations in the brightness of a beam of light. In a parallel manner, the focal plane of the Express Ray moves slowly through the object, progressively, dissolving layers of the thickness of a single atom, which are accurately reproduced at the other focus of the instrument—which might be in Venus!"

"But the analogy of the lens is the better of the two. For no

receiving instrument is required, as in television. The object is built up of an infinite series of plane layers, at the focus of the ray, no matter where that may be. Such a thing would be impossible with radio apparatus because even with the best beam transmission, all but a tiny fraction of the power is lost, and power is required to rebuild the atoms. Do you understand, dear?"

"Not altogether. But I should worry! Here comes breakfast. Let me butter your toast."

A bell had rung at the shaft. She ran to it, and returned with a great silver tray, laden with dainty dishes, which she set on a little side table. They sat down opposite each other, and ate, getting as much satisfaction from contemplation of each other's faces as from the excellent food. When they had finished, she carried the tray to the shaft, slid it in a slot, and touched a button—thus disposing of the culinary cares of the morning.

She ran back to Eric, who was once more staring distastefully at his typewriter.

"Oh, darling! I'm thrilled to death about the Cosmic Express! If we could go to Venus, to a new life on a new world, and get away from all this hateful conventional society—"

"We can go to their office—it's only five minutes. The chap

that operates the machine for the company is a pal of mine. He's not supposed to take passengers except between the offices they have scattered about the world. But I know his weak point—"

Eric laughed, fumbled with a hidden spring under his desk. A small polished object, gleaming silver, slid down into his hand.

"Old friendship, *plus* this, would make him—like spinach."

FIVE minutes later Mr. Eric Stokes-Harding and his pretty wife were in street clothes, light silk tunics of loose, flowing lines—little clothing being required in the artificially warmed city. They entered an elevator and dropped thirty stories to the ground floor of the great building.

There they entered a cylindrical car, with rows of seats down the sides. Not greatly different from an ancient subway car, except that it was air-tight, and was hurled by magnetic attraction and repulsion through a tube exhausted of air, at a speed that would have made an old subway rider gasp with amazement.

In five more minutes their car had whipped up to the base of another building, in the business section, where there was no room for parks between the mighty structures that held the unbrok-

en glass roofs two hundred stories above the concrete pavement.

An elevator brought them up a hundred and fifty stories. Eric led Nada down a long, carpeted corridor to a wide glass door, which bore the words:

COSMIC EXPRESS

stenciled in gold capitals across it.

As they approached, a lean man, carrying a black bag, darted out of an elevator shaft opposite the door, ran across the corridor, and entered. They pushed in after him.

They were in a little room, cut in two by a high brass grill. In front of it was a long bench against the wall, that reminded one of the waiting room in an old railroad depot. In the grill was a little window, with a lazy, brown-eyed youth leaning on the shelf behind it. Beyond him was a great, glittering piece of mechanism, half hidden by the brass. A little door gave access to the machine from the space before the grill.

The thin man in black, whom Eric now recognized as a prominent French heart-specialist, was dancing before the window, waving his bag frantically, raving at the sleepy boy.

"Queek! I have tell you zee truth! I have zee most urgent necessity to go queekly. A pa-

tient I have in Paree, zat ees in zee most creetical condition!"

"Hold your horses just a minute, Mister. We got a client in the machine now. Russian diplomat from Moscow to Rio de Janeiro. . . . Two hundred seventy dollars and eighty cents, please. . . . Your turn next. Remember this is just an experimental service. Regular installations all over the world in a year. . . . Ready now. Come on in."

The youth took the money, pressed a button. The door sprang open in the grill, and the frantic physician leaped through it.

"Lie down on the crystal, face up," the young man ordered. "Hands at your sides, don't breathe. Ready!"

He manipulated his dials and switches, and pressed another button.

"Why, hello, Eric, old man!" he cried. "That's the lady you were telling me about? Congratulations!" A bell jangled before him on the panel. "Just a minute. I've got a call."

He punched the board again. Little bulbs lit and glowed for a second. The youth turned toward the half-hidden machine, spoke courteously.

"All right, madam. Walk out. Hope you found the transit pleasant."

"But my Violet! My precious Violet!" a shrill female voice

came from the machine. "Sir, what have you done with my darling Violet?"

"I'm sure I don't know, madam. You lost it off your hat?"

"None of your impertinence, sir! I want my dog."

"Ah, a dog. Must have jumped off the crystal. You can have him sent on for three hundred and—"

"Young man, if any harm comes to my Violet—I'll—I'll—I'll appeal to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals!"

"Very good, madam. We appreciate your patronage."

THE DOOR flew open again.

A very fat woman, puffing angrily, face highly colored, clothing shimmering with artificial gems, waddled pompously out of the door through which the frantic French doctor had so recently vanished. She rolled heavily across the room, and out into the corridor. Shrill words floated back:

"I'm going to see my lawyer! My precious Violet—"

The sallow youth winked. "And now what can I do for you, Eric?"

"We want to go to Venus, if that ray of yours can put us there."

"To Venus? Impossible. My orders are to use the Express merely between the sixteen des-

ignated stations, at New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, London, Paris—"

"See here, Charley," with a cautious glance toward the door, Eric held up the silver flask. "For old time's sake, and for this—"

The boy seemed dazed at sight of the bright flask. Then, with a single swift motion, he snatched it out of Eric's hand, and bent to conceal it below his instrument panel.

"Sure, old boy. I'd send you to heaven for that, if you'd give me the micrometer readings to set the ray with. But I tell you, this is dangerous. I've got a sort of television attachment, for focusing the ray. I can turn that on Venus—I've been amusing myself, watching the life there, already. Terrible place. Savage. I can pick a place on high land to set you down. But I can't be responsible for what happens afterward."

"Simple, primitive life is what we're looking for. And now what do I owe you—"

"Oh, that's all right. Between friends. Provided that stuff's genuine! Walk in and lie down on the crystal block. Hands at your sides. Don't move."

The little door had swung open again, and Eric led Nada through. They stepped into a little cell, completely surrounded with mirrors and vast prisms

and lenses and electron tubes. In the center was a slab of transparent crystal, eight feet square and two inches thick, with an intricate mass of machinery below it.

Eric helped Nada to a place on the crystal, lay down at her side.

"I think the Express Ray is focused just at the surface of the crystal, from below," he said. "It dissolves our substance, to be transmitted by the beam. It would look as if we were melting into the crystal."

"Ready," called the youth. "Think I've got it for you. Sort of a high island in the jungle. Nothing bad in sight now. But, I say—how're you coming back? I haven't got time to watch you."

"Go ahead. We aren't coming back."

"Gee! What is it? Elopement? I thought you were married already. Or is it business difficulties? The Bears did make an awful raid last night. But you better let me set you down in Hong Kong."

A bell jangled. "So long," the youth called.

Nada and Eric felt themselves enveloped in fire. Sheets of white flame seemed to lap up about them from the crystal block. Suddenly there was a sharp tingling sensation where they touched the polished surface. Then blackness, blankness.

THE next thing they knew, the fires were gone from about them. They were lying in something extremely soft and fluid; and warm rain was beating in their faces. Eric sat up, found himself in a mud-puddle. Beside him was Nada, opening her eyes and struggling up, her bright garments stained with black mud.

All about rose a thick jungle, dark and gloomy—and very wet. Palm-like, the gigantic trees were, or fern-like, flinging clouds of feathery green foliage high against a somber sky of unbroken gloom.

They stood up, triumphant.

"At last!" Nada cried. "We're free! Free of that hateful old civilization! We're back to Nature!"

"Yes, we're on our feet now, not parasites on the machines."

"It's wonderful to have a fine, strong man like you to trust in, Eric. You're just like one of the heroes in your books!"

"You're the perfect companion, Nada. . . . But now we must be practical. We must build a fire, find weapons; set up a shelter of some kind. I guess it will be night, pretty soon. And Charley said something about savage animals he had seen in the television.

"We'll find a nice dry cave, and have a fire in front of the door. And skins of animals to

sleep on. And pottery vessels to cook in. And you will find seeds and grown grain."

"But first we must find a flint-bed. We need flint for tools, and to strike sparks to make a fire with. We will probably come across a chunk of virgin copper, too—it's found native."

Presently they set off through the jungle. The mud seemed to be very abundant, and of a most sticky consistence. They sank into it ankle deep at every step, and vast masses of it clung to their feet. A mile they struggled on, without finding where a provident nature had left them even a single fragment of quartz, to say nothing of a mass of pure copper.

"A darned shame," Eric grumbled, "to come forty million miles, and meet such a reception as this!"

Nada stopped. "Eric," she said, "I'm tired. And I don't believe there's any rock here, anyway. You'll have to use wooden tools, sharpened in the fire."

"Probably you're right. This soil seemed to be of alluvial origin. Shouldn't be surprised if the native rock is some hundreds of feet underground. Your idea is better."

"You can make a fire by rubbing sticks together, can't you?"

"It can be done, I'm sure. I've never tried it, myself. We need some dry sticks, first."

They resumed the weary march, with a good fraction of the new planet adhering to their feet. Rain was still falling from the dark heavens in a steady, warm downpour. Dry wood seemed scarce as the proverbial hen's teeth.

"You didn't bring any matches, dear?"

"Matches! Of course not! We're going back to Nature."

"I hope we get a fire pretty soon."

"If dry wood were gold dust, we couldn't buy a hot dog."

"Eric, that reminds me that I'm hungry."

He confessed to a few pangs of his own. They turned their attention to looking for banana trees, and coconut palms, but they did not seem to abound in the Venerian jungle. Even small animals that might have been slain with a broken branch had contrary ideas about the matter.

At last, from sheer weariness, they stopped, and gathered branches to make a sloping shelter by a vast fallen tree-trunk.

"This will keep out the rain—maybe—" Eric said hopefully. "And tomorrow, when it has quit raining—I'm sure we'll do better."

They crept in, as gloomy night fell without. They lay in each other's arms, the body warmth oddly comforting. Nada cried a little.

"Buck up," Eric advised her. "We're back to nature—where we've always wanted to be."

WITH the darkness, the temperature fell somewhat, and a high wind rose, whipping cold rain into the little shelter, and threatening to demolish it. Swarms of mosquito-like insects, seemingly not inconvenienced in the least by the inclement elements, swarmed about them in clouds.

Then came a sound from the dismal stormy night, a hoarse, bellowing roar, raucous, terrifying.

Nada clung against Eric. "What is it, dear?" she chattered.

"Must be a reptile. Dinosaur, or something of the sort. This world seems to be in about the same state as the earth when they flourished there. . . . But maybe it won't find us."

The roar was repeated, nearer. The earth trembled beneath a mighty tread.

"Eric," a thin voice trembled. "Don't you think—it might have been better— You know the old life was not so bad, after all."

"I was just thinking of our rooms, nice and warm and bright, with hot foods coming up the shaft whenever we pushed the button, and the gay crowds in the park, and my old typewriter."

"Eric?" she called softly.

"Yes, dear."

"Don't you wish—we had known better?"

"I do." If he winced at the "we" the girl did not notice.

The roaring outside was closer. And suddenly it was answered by another raucous bellow, at considerable distance, that echoed strangely through the forest. The tearful sounds were repeated, alternately. And always the more distant seemed nearer, until the two sounds were together.

And then an infernal din broke out in the darkness. Bellows. Screams Deafening shrieks. Mighty splashes, as if struggling Titans had upset oceans. Thunderous crashes, as if they were demolishing forests.

Eric and Nada clung to each other, in doubt whether to stay or to fly through the storm. Gradually the sound of the conflict came nearer, until the earth shook beneath them, and they were afraid to move.

Suddenly the great fallen tree against which they had erected the flimsy shelter was rolled back, evidently by a chance blow from the invisible monsters. The pitiful roof collapsed on the bedraggled humans. Nada burst into tears.

"Oh, if only—if only—"

SUDDENLY flame lapped up about them, the same white fire they had seen as they lay on the crystal block. Dizziness, insensibility overcame them. A few moments later, they were lying on the transparent table in the Cosmic Express office, with all those great mirrors and prisms and lenses about them.

A bustling, red-faced official appeared through the door in the grill, fairly bubbling apologies.

"So sorry—an accident—inconceivable. I can't see how he got it! We got you back as soon as we could find a focus. I sincerely hope you haven't been injured."

"Why—what—what—"

"Why I happened in, found our operator drunk. I've no idea where he got the stuff. He muttered something about Venus. I consulted the auto-register, and found two more passengers registered here than had been recorded at our other stations. I looked up the duplicate beam coordinates, and found that it had been set on Venus. I got men on the television at once, and we happened to find you."

"I can't imagine how it happened. I've had the fellow locked

up, and the 'dry-laws' are on the job. I hope you won't hold us for excessive damages."

"No, I ask nothing except that you don't press charges against the boy. I don't want him to suffer for it in any way. My wife and I will be perfectly satisfied to get back to our apartment."

"I don't wonder. You look like you've been through—I don't know what. But I'll have you there in five minutes. My private car—"

* * *

Mr. Eric Stokes-Harding noted author of primitive life and love, ate a hearty meal with his pretty spouse, after they had washed off the grime of another planet. He spent the next twelve hours in bed.

At the end of the month he delivered his promised story to his publishers, a thrilling tale of a man marooned on Venus, with a beautiful girl. The hero made stone tools, erected a dwelling for himself and his mate, hunted food for her, defended her from the mammoth saurian monsters of the Venerian jungles.

The book was a huge success.

THE END

When answering advertisements—please say you saw it in
AMAZING STORIES



THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND. By Robert A. Heinlein. 408 pp. G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$4.50.

A perfect illustration of the range of quality possible within the science fiction field is provided this month in two disparate works of the same author, Robert A. Heinlein. Few names in this literature conjure up so much respect as Heinlein's, and few are so well known. He is a writer of high standards and a prolific one as well. Yet this new book—long, ambitious, obviously meant to be a major work—not only disappointed me personally, but will furnish those who belittle science fiction with ammunition enough for a long time to come.

Stranger in a Strange Land is the story of Valentine Michael Smith's first trip to Earth. The son of two members of the first expedition to Mars, he is the sole survivor of the landing and is

brought up by the Martians (somewhat after the fashion of Romulus and Remus). Smith is brought to Earth when he is about twenty by the second expedition to Mars. His arrival is a sensation as far as the general populace goes, but causes consternation in various official circles. In fact, the most entertaining parts of the book are those in the beginning which deal with the legal complications caused by Smith's appearance. He turns out to be incredibly wealthy and powerful through twists of circumstance which I won't reveal here for the sake of those people who decide to plow through the book in spite of my admonitions.

Smith is spirited away from those who try to keep him incognito through the connivance of Gillian Boardman, his nurse, and Ben Caxton, a reporter. They find refuge for him at the estate of Jubal Harshaw, one of the most annoying and tedious old

cracker barrel philosophers whom it has ever been my misfortune to meet. The strange thing about Harshaw is that when he is first introduced, he seems to be a rather enjoyable and original cuss, the last bastion of eccentricity and "orneriness" left in a synthetic world, but one doesn't realize what a lion's share of the dialogue he's going to command.

The story proceeds in a reciprocal fashion, showing Smith's impressions of and effect on the people he meets, and what he in turn learns from them. This is a fairly complex matter, for while Smith looks human, he thinks like and has the powers of a Martian—he can move objects and people, cause them to disincorporate, slow his own respiration rate, etc. During the course of the book, this dichotomy between his heredity and his environment becomes synthesized in the most nauseating religio-sexual fashion. But at least he becomes a whole, however untasty, something that the book never accomplishes. It remains as it started, a strange indigestible mixture of elements which try unsuccessfully to co-exist. Heinlein throws in sarcasm, satire and deadly serious sermonizing with all the subtlety and finesse of a Mack truck.

I thought I was sick to death of the arbitrary lengths that

Avalon and Ace Double books impose upon their writers. In fact, I have often commented in this column that one of the constant errors in books that cross my desk is the way one bit of action trips over the heels of another, completely unmotivated, without breathing space or adequate time for description or character development. Well, I'll eat my words! After 408 pages of this pretentious balderdash, I'm sated. I've had my fill of gooey desserts; I'm ready for some more lean meat.

6 X M. By Robert A. Heinlein. Paperback reprint. Pyramid 35¢.

Appearing at the same time as the above, this small paperback reprint containing six stories by Mr. Heinlein written between 1941 and 1959 shines like a jewel in spite of its unpretentious formal and modest scope. It features his superb short novel, *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag*, and five short stories. The *Hoag* novel has elements of both fantasy and mystery. It is sometimes sinister and sometimes visionary, and it builds to a fresh and thought-provoking ending. All of the short stories are entertaining. If there is a particular one that stands out in my mind, it is "The Man Who Traveled in Elephants" simply because it embodies a quality that is not generally as-

sociated with Heinlein; an almost eye-stinging warmth. This 35¢ bargain cannot be recommended too highly.

TIME IS THE SIMPLEST THING. By Clifford D. Simak. 263 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$3.95.

In his latest, Clifford Simak has tried to write an adventure story, but he keeps getting in his own way. Sooner or later the action just stops while one can almost visualize the author settling back on the front stoop with a beer and a philosophical cud to chew. All of which is fine and fun, and author's privilege, but like as not, he's left his hero in some kind of Perils-of-Pauline predicament. Unfortunately, too, between the kaffee-klatch breaks, and the need to further the action, very little time and space remain for the particular thing at which Mr. Simak can outdo everyone around—his ability to take a plant or animal or alien and make it as pathetic and lovable as a child's much-battered teddy bear. Surely everyone remembers the dog who was the old family retainer in *City* or the intelligent plant from another planet in *The Worlds of Clifford Simak*.

In the current novel, there is a touch of this in a large, sedentary intelligence on a far off planet, referred to as the Pink-

ness (after his color, naturally). The all-too-brief glimpses of him only whet our appetite. In a few short strokes, this creature becomes a full-blown personality with a passion for telling yarns and a yearning for visitors with whom he can swap them.

But now back to the main story, since that is what the author has tried to do. Man has followed the promise of science in his effort to get to the stars, but the radiation belts have defeated all the dreams that the first space experiments opened up. There were a few men who wouldn't give up, however. Unable to reach other worlds by machines, they gradually unlocked latent human resources and reached them by the power of the mind. An organization called Fishhook was built up around these men, with an all-powerful monopoly on the benefits that this wealth of new knowledge could bestow. The hero is Shep Blaine, one of Fishhook's mind travelers who becomes a fugitive from the organization. In fact, one of the major plot weaknesses is that Simak gives away much too early in the game the fact that Fishhook is not the great, unselfish seeker-after-knowledge that one supposes in the beginning. The other weak spot is the space devoted to the persecution of the "pariahs" or "parries" (as the

people with paranormal powers are called), both by the elite paranormals who are part of Fishhook and by the normal populace. Hardly a book is written about such people but that they are objects of hate and suspicion by those not so blessed. From A. E. van Vogt's *Slan* on up and down, this has been one of science fictions staples—valid but hardly original. And originality is what we have come to expect from Mr. Simak. However, if you'll just settle for entertainment this time, the book will supply it in good measure.

ISLAND IN THE SKY. By Manly Wade Wellman. 223 pp. Avalon Books. \$2.95.

One of the "classic" S-F plots forms the root of this latest Wellman novel. I don't have anything against "old hat" themes, but unfortunately the treatment is of a corresponding quality. The story is one of those along Rip Van Winklish lines, where a character is on another planet, or in suspended animation, or deep freeze, etc. for such a period of time that the conditions confronting him on his return, or revival, or reawakening, are enough to fill up a book (at least in a cursory fashion). In the case of *Island in the Sky* the hero, Blackie Peyton, comes again to the surface after spending twenty years in prison in the

depths of the earth. He had been committed for life when he was sixteen and can hardly believe it when he finds himself pardoned. But his release doesn't bring him the freedom for which he'd hoped. All Earth is under the domination of the Airmen whose control is made absolute through a satellite of island proportions which is in continuous orbit over the belt of cities that remain. So far so good, except that Blackie Peyton is an ass in lion's clothing, a real muscleman whose prowess with his fist is equalled only by his love of fisticuffs. And then, enter the heroine, dazzlingly beautiful, natch. She has been forced to work for the Other Side, but she is really for Blackie, natch,, and also turns out to be an ex-prisoner who was pardoned. (Aha! Common interests! I smell romance!). As one might imagine, things get progressively worse: the Airmen are defeated by a tiny force of determined men, the new era of sweetness and light dawns, hero and heroine head for New Jersey to put their joint hands to the plough for wilderness reclamation.

P.S. There's even a character called Gramp Hooker!

SKYPORT. By Curt Siodmak. 159 pp. Signet Books. Paper: 35¢.

The hero of this opus is a stuffed shirt named Dr. Lee F. Powers, one of those iron men

who pop up all too often in science fiction literature. He is young, handsome, wealthy, bright, famous, and dull-dull-dull! He never really fails in anything he sets out to do, and chances are he won't in the future, either. He never acts on impulse or allows impulse to act on him. Consequently his behavior is so mechanical that he might just as well be a robot. If he were, he might at least stimulate us through his structure if not through his acts. Now I grant you that a great deal of entertaining literature (and not science fiction alone) is filled with virtuous heroes, but at least most authors have the common sense to let them get a bit ruffled or mistreated before they triumph in the end.

Insofar as it is possible for a book to succeed with such a handicap, however, *Skyport* can be said to do so. The fascination of building a hotel in the sky is there. The business finagling that goes on between two hotel tycoons, the technical problems faced by the scientific staff—all this is ably presented and interesting in itself, but sooner or later the fun is marred by the entrance of Dr. Powers.

One real bit of fun is furnished by the numerous opportunities for spoofing some of today's big hotel chains; their luxurious standardization, and their unend-

ing search for the exotic site.

The arrangement of faults and virtues in *Skyport* leads me to believe that if Mr. Siodmak would drop in at his friendly neighborhood bar and enjoy unhurried converse with the characters therein, he might yet prove very well able to produce a good book.

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER.

By Louise and Leslie Waller.
G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$1.50.

This is another of the many spoofs of Earth life, culture and mores which have appeared with increasing frequency in the past several years. In many respects it is the most damning one to date (even though not 100% successful in what it attempts). Why is this so? Well, simply because it does not exaggerate or use cartoons or lampoons or any such tools of the satirist's trade. It relies solely on the truth; its illustrations are actual news photographs (already taken for other purposes), and the results are devastating.

The book purports to be a copy of a "guide to the biology of the Earth, its creatures and life-patterns" for use of the citizens of the solar system. Accompanying each photograph is a brief description of what the Martians (who prepared the guidebook) take the scene to represent. Covered are such topics as education, cleanliness, politics, etc.

If there is any fault to be found with the book, it is that the results could be funnier still given the wide selection of situations to choose from. In addition, the more astute the reader, the more pleasure he will derive from

perusing the photos, because full enjoyment depends a great deal on being able to identify the people or the situations really depicted. As you may have guessed, this is obviously not the intended purpose of the text.



COMING NEXT MONTH

A brilliant, funny, satiric new novel by Mark Clifton headlines the January issue of AMAZING.

Titled *Pawn of the Black Fleet*, it uses an old device—earth threatened with extinction by aliens—to present an entirely new viewpoint of modern man.

Another "sense of wonder" story in the January AMAZING is *Towers of Titan*, a novelet by **Ben Bova**. On the icy plains of Titan, mysterious towers, giving off pulsations of energy, have stood for eons. Can man solve their mystery and their purpose in time?



A fact article on a novel interplanetary vehicle now under design—The "Mars Snooper"—plus short stories and our usual departments, fill out the issue. Be sure to reserve a copy of the January AMAZING on sale at your newsstand Dec. 7.

(Continued from page 6)

magnetism, and it behaves consistently, provided no miracles are wrought. It seems to me that all of the points raised by Miss Norton hinge on this one. If Pendelton has a random sampling computer, then he can let the computer decide whether he, Pendelton, will change his mind, and if so when, and to what. All decision requirements that arise during the course of the experiment can be referred by Pendelton to the computer, so that the only non-random event that occurs is the one that gave Pendelton the idea to test God in the first place. And this idea he could plainly have gotten in either a deterministic or free will universe.

As far as Pendleton being simply God's tool in fashioning another man's destiny, we have to decide whether the man's name is truly selected by a random process. In other words, is it possible that God could know in advance the end product of a random process? To me this sounds as though God would have to work one of His miracles, the miracle of informing Himself about the end product of a process that He created to be a non-predictable one. And if He has to work a miracle every time Pendleton uses the computer, then He is in trouble. However, if Miss Norton wants to involve

paradox and define God as He who can predict random processes, then it's predestined that this argument will get nowhere.

I should add that there is one other point that got past Miss Norton altogether. In the story, chaplain Rowan tore a swatch of material from a girl's knit wool dress. I have since tried this out and it doesn't work. Seems there's too much give in the wool.

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

I have been meaning to write for lo these many months now regarding the stories of one Mr. David R. Bunch. I thought I had better let you know that you are not alone in liking his stories, since I don't want to see you stop publishing them. Now I see, in a recent issue that another reader has come forth with what I think are very correct estimations of Mr. Bunch's work. All I can add to these comments is the following quote from an article in *The New York Times* by Warren Miller, titled "The Little Little Magazines and the Big Little Magazines."

"There are two writers who ought to be mentioned—David Bunch and John Rechy. Bunch appears in *SF Review* #5 with a story called 'Riders of Thunder.' He is very talented; he takes the well-worn material of the Beats

... but he has worked with them in a way that none of the Beat writers have yet shown themselves capable of; that is, he gives us not only the prose and the jargon but a sense of their lives as well.

"Rechy . . . has, like Woolf, Deck, Bunch and a very few others, the new eyes and the new mouth we must now demand of writers."

A few years ago I published a fanzine in which appeared a few of David Bunch's stories, which, one might assume, since it circulated among fans, would have a higher concentration of discriminating readers. However, everyone who wrote me disliked his stories. I don't know why this reaction is the rule, but your experience seems to substantiate the fact.

The last remaining thing I can say in Mr. Bunch's favor is that his stories were the reason I began buying your magazines again and thereby discovered what a fine job of reclamation you've done.

Ron Smith
Box 134
Cayon, Calif.

• *The Bunch controversy gathers steam. So far the vote continues anti-Bunch, but proponents of each view are die-hards. Ever wonder what all this does to the psyche of Mr. Bunch?*

Dear Editor:

This letter is prompted by a remark in Sam Moskowitz' latest profile, that on Bradbury in the October issue. He comments that during the mid-'40's Bradbury followed the usual pulp formulas, "even doing a revival of Robert E. Howard's Conan in *Lorelei of the Red Mist* in collaboration with Leigh Brackett." This, admittedly a minor point, does a disservice to both Bradbury and Brackett. The Conan of *Lorelei* has no relation with Howard's series character. "Conan" is a fairly common name in Celtic mythology and folklore, and Miss Brackett often used the latter as a source of proper names in her stories. And aside from the coincidence of names, there is certainly little else in common between *Lorelei* and the Howard stores; the former is much closer in mood and style to the type of fantastic adventure in which C. L. Moore specialized, during the late '20's.

Incidentally, it might be of interest to note that the story (*Lorelei*) was not, strictly speaking, a collaboration. Miss Brackett wrote the first half of the story, and then was forced to drop it in order to meet a script-writing commitment at one of the Hollywood studios; she turned the ms. over to Bradbury to be finished independently. I have always considered it a re-

... OR SO YOU SAY

137

markable achievement on his part that he was able to match the mood and style of the first half so closely that the "change-over point" is all but unidentifiable.

General comments on AMAZING and FANTASTIC; keep the Moskowitz articles, which are always well-done and enjoyable; keep Adkins on the illustrations, and try to get more work by George Barr (especially his pen-and-ink work) and Larry Ivie; keep using serials and long novelettes—they seem to come off better than the shorter works; more Leiber (especially Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser); more Jack Vance (why not reprint the six episodes of his *The Dying Earth* in FANTASTIC—they represent some of the finest fantasy written in the last thirty years); keep the Schomburg covers; and lose David R. Bunch and Moderan. Get Poul Anderson to write the sequel to his novel *The Broken Sword* as a serial for FANTASTIC. (And when I really start dreaming, I get ideas like Hannes Bok cover paintings and interiors and stories by Leigh Brackett.

Robert E. Briney

319 Beacon St., #10
Boston 16, Mass.

● *You will be interested to know that Barr has finished several cover illustrations for future issues of Fantastic.*

Dear Editor:

Your editorial in AMAZING for July makes sense. These lines are just to let you know that the editorial was appreciated.

It seems to me that a program of education should be instituted that would cause the people of earth to understand that other peoples exist on other worlds, and that this fact should not necessarily be a cause for fear. The chances are that those on other worlds are intelligent and maybe more kindly disposed than earth people.

Why it should become a crisis, a thing of terror, to discover that other people exist, is beyond this writer. Perhaps we common people have more common sense than those we have for leaders, who are fearful of what the common people might do always.

H. Conard
3514 Division St.
Bremerton, Wash.

● *For a difference of opinion, Mr. Conrad, read on.*

Dear Editor:

I can hardly agree with your July editorial. Overlooking the fact that neither of the sources you quoted leant any support whatsoever to your concluding generalization, I would like to take issue with you thusly:

If life approached, landed on, and/or threatened Earth, its in-

habitants, and its civilization, it is my belief that the general reaction would be similar in physical qualities to that of the attacked medieval citizens of Anderson's recent "The High Crusade": an immediate gathering of arms, rebellion, and open warfare. Mentally, humans would resent having their "privacy," as it were, invaded, and retaliate. And, if it turned out that the other race was far superior to ours, they would simply not believe it, insisting upon the philosophy of Patrick Henry ("Give me liberty," etc.) . . . or else!

As to your statement that humans are desperately praying that no one will land on Earth: I think it is safe to say that the majority of us who have any intelligent opinion, one way or the other, hope and pray that we will find life on another planet—maybe Mars, if we're lucky. I do not know how they would respond if we found the Martians the same year they found us, but I am sure that the main emotion would be that of interest and excitement, not of frenzy, terror, and panic.

Richard L. Bartlett
619 Ridgcrest Rd.
Gainesville, Ga.

● *Let us clarify two things:*

1) *We said "humans" hope no aliens will reach here, not "the intelligent majority"; 2) there is a big and significant difference*

between ETs arriving here and Terrans going off to explore/exploit Martians.

to: the ed.

re: "The Legacy"

i like the vignette.

i LOVE the vignette.

i *WRITE* the vignette.

but Mr. Hank he of the falseringing name attempts to defame the form thru formlessness, stripped of its lack of all order

this piece is less ordered than prose while touted as poetry and verse as any student of 101 English perceives or sends teachers to the brink of profanity is just like prose only better ordered standing without plot characters or true moodimagery would not hold the eye for twenty words. facing a topic on the fringes of expression this new writer? decides to discards all valid methods which his betters have used for centuries and turns to a style approaching the artificiality/obnoxiousness of his topic. he fails to move the mind though the belly swells with green bile and the

OR SO YOU SAY

139

urge to regurge is upon me. and while this short-short-*ad brevitam*-short is not worthy of publication all true of which the said Hanks is not one poets will recoil at the writing of any verse even this the worst in lines like prose. i suggest that if a poem is not worthy of the space to write it out omit and finally when you receive something short unto shortness which defies classification please do not call it vignette for want of a name but in this case i think you had to use this appellation since the only true descriptive name could not see print.

E. E. Evers

Box #105 Hapner Hall
Bozeman, Mont.

o *E. E. Evers, eh? Are you any relation to e. e. cummings.*

Dear Editor:

I believe that in recent times your sales must have risen tremendously. Whether it's just that more people seem to be reading science fiction nowadays or maybe just because its summer, I don't know, but AMAZING sells faster than any other magazine on the newsstands—I know, I've checked it. Your August edi-

tion went on sale Tuesday, July 11th. When I came to buy my copy, that very same day, only four or five hours after it was put up on the stand, only one copy was left. And it looked like the aftermath of a mad rush. Therefore, I believe your magazine is becoming quite popular.

The stories were good, as usual, and I especially enjoyed the first installment of the sequel by Jeff Sutton, and T. D. Hamm's "The Survivors."

The profile of A. E. van Vogt was excellently written and very interesting. By the way, a fellow science fiction fan phoned me and asked whether I knew where Mr. van Vogt lived. Of course, I didn't, but maybe Mr. Moskowitz can help. Where does he live? And Mr. Heinlein too? I think it would be a good idea to equip your future profiles with addresses—that is, unless the authors object to getting fan mail.

Bob Adolfsen
9 Prospect Ave.
Sea Cliff, N. Y.

o *Have a heart. If we printed addresses those fellows would be so busy answering mail they'd never have time to write stories.*

Dear Editor:

In regard to your August, 1961 issue, with notice especially to the Moskowitz article:

The issue as a whole was good, although I can hardly advocate a policy which includes publishing an issue containing only three short stories. However, the quality of the serial was such as to advocate this policy in itself.

The purpose of this letter is to bring to focus Sam Moskowitz's inept attempt to profile A. E. van Vogt.

In the first place, the opening gambit is, as far as I can tell, completely false. Never have I come across, in print or in conversation, anything or anybody referred to as a "slan—" in fact or in fiction—unless the comparison was definitely stated, with reference to van Vogt's magnificent story.

This, however, is completely irrelevant. I must say that Mr. Moskowitz' research is decidedly inferior: every single van Vogt piece he mentioned could be had by any sf fan if the latter simply bought all the recent v.V. publications (*Triad*; *Empire of the Atom*; *The War Against the Rull*; *Seige of the Unseen*; and a few recent anthologies (Conklin & Healy-McComas) along with *Away and Beyond* and *Destination: Universe*). Skipping over the fact that Mr. Moskowitz is either in ignorance of the fact or disdained to mention that *Empire of the Atom* has a sequel (*The Wizard of Linn*, a 3-part serial in ASTOUNDING; never pub-

lished in book form), which would have been invaluable to the sf newcomer. And if he stoops to mention such a minor vV piece as "The Chronicler" (*Seige of the Unseen*, Ace) why didn't he mention *Mind Cage* as well?

But it is this gentleman's omission that startled me strongly: he did not make any mention of the Mixed Men saga (*The Mixed Man*) or the sequel to *World of Null-A* (called *Pawns* of same); he did not mention vV's effective combination of sf and mystery (*House That Stood Still*, regrettably reprinted recently by Beacon). And why was there not a word about the fantasies van Vogt published, which also were among his very first stories ("Witch;" "Ghost;" "The Sea Thing"), in UNKNOWN? Also, the later (if minor) *Book of Ptah*.

Finally, Mr. Moskowitz' handling of the material he did review irritated me strongly. If a novice to van Vogt were to pick up the article, it would appear that aside from "Black Destroyer," "Vault of the Beast," "Discord in Scarlet," and one or two others, van Vogt's short stories were mainly average. What about "Secret Unattainable" (ASF, 1942)? And among the recent ones, what about "Fulfillment," which rates to me as his best short yarn by far? Or "Process" (F&SF, Dec., 1950), which rates

... OR SO YOU SAY

almost as high, despite its extreme shortness?

Finally, the uninformed reader would assume that: a) incomprehension of *World of Null-A* was universal and b) the story was not particularly liked until after the readers wisened up. Completely false! *World* was rated high and many letters of praise were published during its course. One or two readers were rash enough to say that they liked it more than *Slan*. . . .

Try again, Mr. Moskowitz. You did much better with Lovecraft.

Charles D. Cunningham
822 Cherokee Rd., NE
Gainesville, Ga.

o *Two rebuttals, sir. 1) Space precludes listing a complete bibliography of an author's works; 2) The Profile is an "opinion" article, and Mr. Moskowitz has free rein to express his judgements. So, obviously, do you.*

o *And while we're at it, readers who defend and attack Sam Moskowitz' profiles (and profilees) will be interested to get the reactions of the subject himself. Herewith—Van Vogt on Van Vogt:*

Dear Editor:

I read the profile on me (in the August issue) with pleasure. I never knew that Sam Moskowitz had enjoyed my writings so much. Seldom have my stories

been praised so highly, and his criticism of my other activities pales to insignificance compared to his validation of my fiction.

I do feel that Sam's complaints about me reflect his irritation with growing older. Perhaps, he wants the aging authors, whose writings once gave him so much pleasure, to stop all this other nonsense, and revive for him the joys of his vanished youth.

I'm hopeful that a long new novel (titled *The Violent Man*), which I am in process of completing, will answer his doubts about my creativity. It's not science fiction, but I'm not through with sf by any means.

A. E. van Vogt

Dear Editor:

The September issue of AMAZING contained a couple of misconceptions about the moon which have been current in sf for many years and which should at last be cleared up.

First, no slope on the moon's surface has been found with an angle much greater than 50 degrees. The "great peaks" are actually only gentle swellings and the long cracks observed are actually three times wider than they are deep. A recent determination of the slope angle of the Straight Wall, much mentioned in sf stories as a towering cliff, revealed that it was only about 45

degrees. Every cover painting of the moon that I have seen has contained towering cliffs and mountains. This is an error and should be corrected.

The fact article pointed out that vehicles on the moon would have to be protected from "meteoric rain." It is generally agreed by students of the moon that at the height where meteors burn in the Earth's atmosphere the lunar atmosphere is actually denser. Thus, the moon is in no more danger from meteors than the Earth is. Is your car shielded against meteor impacts?

A "willing suspension of disbelief" is essential to the enjoyment of sf, but am I wrong when I ask that known scientific concepts be accepted as they actually are in science-fiction stories? If an author is going to write about the moon, or use a satellite of Saturn as a setting, I believe that he should first do a little reading about recent findings on these places instead of using the generally accepted thirty year old science that has been used by previous writers. To use an old cliché, the facts are often more amazing than fiction.

David B. Williams
714 Dale Street
Normal, Illinois

● *Noted, digested, agreed, and passed on FYI to our writers. However, you underestimate us*

on one count. My car is not only shielded against meteorites; it is gimmicked so the steering wheel locks when a lady driver touches it, and it starts automatically when the instalment collector arrives.

Dear Editor:

After I bought a copy of the September AMAZING last week, I was very disappointed. To be fair to the buyers of your magazine you should remove all mention of fact or science from the cover. The stories had very little science. They were also poorly written, but I won't complain as much about that.

I have never read a Philip Jose Farmer story as poorly thought out as "Tongues of the Moon." When I encountered the "flexible beam of 'straightened-out' photons" and the "compressed photons" I started to dislike the story. When light beams were used like swords to catch and deflect other light beams I became thoroughly sick of it.

I happen to know what astigmatism is and I can't conceive of it making transformations of the sort described in "Hen's Eyes." Brian Aldiss is trying to sell us black magic labeled as optics.

The first part of "The Man Who Had No Brains" was pretty good. I wondered how the hero would solve all his problems. Now

I find that the author has taken the easy way out by making his character a superman. At least one fan has had his fill of superman stories. The system of "elections" was ridiculous. How can any accurate sampling be taken when only three factors out of thousands are measured? The three are not even selected to cover a useful range of knowledge. At the end it is stated that psychokinesis is the only way to remove the mountain of rock over the spaceship cavern. Some of our large mining and construction companies have removed mountains without PK.

I notice American Bosch-Arma Corporation is given credit for the drawings by Tinsley. Did the Bosch engineers design the moon explorer and call Tinsley in to do the drawing? I suspect they did because there are no flaws in its design. The types of vehicle that are regarded as unsuitable have heavy metal hulls and use bulky metal frames while the Explorer uses light-metal frames and lightweight honeycomb structure. I protest this unequal treatment! Inflated fabric structures are probably heavier than an equivalent metal structure. The main advantages of inflated fabric are compact stowage and quick erection. The design of the Explorer is interesting and ingenious, but it must be fairly compared with other designs.

At least the letter column is better than it was a couple of years ago.

Robert Thrun
R. 1, Box 157
Union Grove, Wisconsin

● *To be fair to the editors, Sir, critical readers should remember that in addition to the words "fact" and "science" on our cover, there are also the words "amazing," "fiction" and "stories."*

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

Anent your Profile on Ray Bradbury in the October Issue—I feel that I speak for many when I make the following observations:

There are many, many of us who love the Bradbury of "The Martian Chronicles" and "Illustrated Man." But we are too confused by the Bradbury of "The October Country" and a collection of his which was called, I believe, "The Golden Apples of the Sun." Our confusion descends into boredom and we ignore Mr. Bradbury.

If he can return to writing the kind of science fiction that he wrote in "The Martian Chronicles" we will follow him to all ends of the Galaxy. But, if he insists upon writing the kind of involved and "arty" fantasy that is

(continued on page 146)



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... OR SO YOU SAY

(continued from page 144)

found in "October Country" then we will turn to other writers.

I am not praising writing which has no literary quality when I plead with Mr. Bradbury to return to writing stories with both emotion and plots, but I, for

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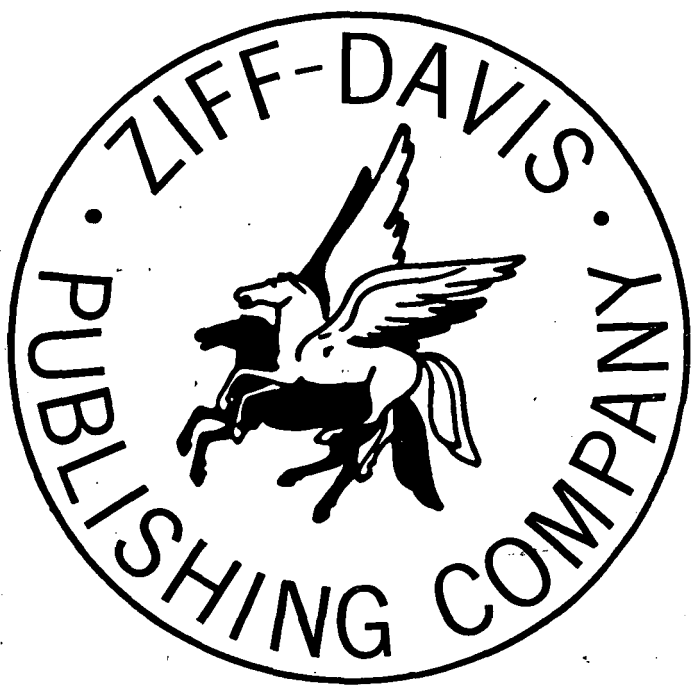
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